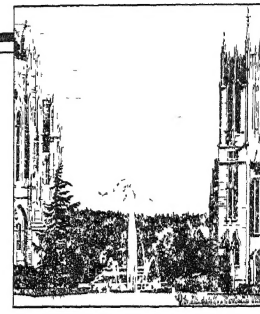

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THE COMPLETE GREEK DRAMA

A Composite Photograph of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,*
as Produced at Delphi in 1930

THE
Complete Greek Drama

ALL THE EXTANT TRAGEDIES OF AESCHYLUS, SOPHOCLES AND EURIPIDES, AND THE COMEDIES OF ARISTOPHANES AND MENANDER, IN A VARIETY OF TRANSLATIONS

EDITED BY

WHITNEY J. OATES

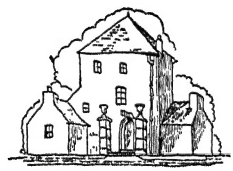
AND

EUGENE O'NEILL, JR.

IN TWO VOLUMES

I

VOLUME ONE



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To Mrs. Harry Fine for Paul Elmer More's translation of *Prometheus Bound*.

To L. A. Post for his introductions and translations of *The Girl from Samos, The Arbitration* and *The Shearing of Glycera*.

PREFACE

THE aim of the present publication is to give English readers in a single book the complete corpus of the extant Greek drama. The plays themselves have been in the past available only in individual translations, or in translations of single dramatists, or in translations of a few plays selected from the total number that has survived. The editors have endeavoured to choose the best available translation for each individual play. In some instances they were faced with an embarrassment of riches, while in others they were constrained to include a version with which they were somewhat dissatisfied, yet which clearly seemed to be superior to the other renderings at their disposal. The main criteria for determining the value of a particular version were these: essential correspondence to the Greek original considered as a whole, plus as close fidelity as possible to the original in specific detail. Whether the version was in prose or verse was not made a primary consideration in the process of selection, but careful observance of the main criteria resulted in collecting a group of translations, thirty of which are in prose, fifteen in verse, and two in a combination of prose and verse. The variety of translations should enable the reader to obtain a better conception of the originals than would be possible if all the versions were from a single hand, however dexterous.

Every effort has been made to impress upon the reader the extreme importance of the musical element in the Greek plays. To accomplish this end, all choral or singing passages in the prose versions have been indented, and broken up into their various choric constituents. Likewise, speeches which are attributed to the Chorus in the manuscripts, if they are written in the regular metre of the dialogue passages, have been assigned to the Leader of the Chorus, who thus becomes almost another member of the cast. Furthermore, all passages which were sung or chanted, so far as can be determined by their metre in the original, have been so indicated in the present text.

As much uniformity as was possible has been imposed upon the texts. Certain inconsistencies remain, but they are for the most part attributable to the idiosyncrasies of the particular translator. Complete uniformity has hence been not only impossible to achieve, but also undesir-

able, since certain translations would have been impaired in the effort to bring about greater consistency. Many of the versions were almost completely lacking in stage directions. An attempt has been made to supply that deficiency, but no stage direction has been added which cannot reasonably be inferred from the text itself, since there are practically no such directions in the Greek manuscripts of the plays.

No verse translations have been altered in any particular by the editors. The anonymous prose version of Aristophanes has been exhaustively corrected and revised, while certain minor modifications have been introduced into the translations of Euripides by E. P. Coleridge. The remaining prose versions appear as they were originally published.

The General Introduction attempts to present certain material, both historical and systematic, which is requisite to the understanding of the plays. It treats, for example, such subjects as the nature of the Greek theatre, Greek Tragedy and Greek Comedy in general, and the lives and works of the individual dramatists. Accompanying each play is a short special introduction to that play, designed primarily to facilitate its understanding on the part of the reader. Each play also is accompanied by notes which endeavour to explain particular passages which otherwise might prove difficult to apprehend. A Glossary, mainly of proper names, appears at the end of Volume II, which renders unnecessary a number of specific notes on the individual plays. It is hoped that the Glossary will prove a useful and valuable adjunct to the book, being particularly important for the plays of Aristophanes with their wealth of topical allusions.

The editors wish to thank Professors D. R. Stuart, G. E. Duckworth, F. R. B. Godolphin, N. H. Pearson, H. C. Hutchins, and Dr. N. T. Pratt for invaluable assistance in the preparation of this book. They are particularly grateful to Professor L. A. Post for permission to use his introductions and revised translation of the comedies of Menander. They wish also to express their appreciation to Mrs. Thomas S. Dignan for assistance in connection with the frontispiece for Volume I, and to Professor Margarete Bieber for permission to use one of her photographs as the frontispiece to Volume II.

The editors together assume the responsibility for the selection of translations. Mr. Oates edited the text, prepared the individual introductions and notes for the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He also prepared that part of the General Introduction which deals with tragedy and the tragedians. Mr. O'Neill edited the text, revised the translation, and prepared the individual introductions and notes for the plays of Aristophanes, as well as that portion of the General Introduction which deals with comedy and the comic poets. He likewise compiled the Glossary.

The editors also desire to express their thanks to Random House for their courteous cooperation, and for their willingness to undertake this publication which, it is earnestly hoped, will further the understanding and appreciation of these masterpieces of Greek creative art.

Whitney J. Oates
Eugene O'Neill, Jr.

May 6, 1938

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I. Tragedy

ALL the extant plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were written during the fifth century B.C. Behind them lies a rich literary and dramatic, or at least quasi-dramatic tradition, which accounts in no small measure for the depth, scope and complexity of the art form which the plays embody. The problem of apprehending and fully understanding the dramas is therefore not a simple one, since they cannot be divorced completely from the epic, lyric, and dramatic tradition which precedes them. By far the most important factor in the tradition is the epic which we know chiefly through the great Homeric masterpieces, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These poems present a most comprehensive view of human life, marked by an astonishing sophistication, coupled with a most refreshing naïveté. These two attributes are so blended in the Homeric epics that they possess a distinctive and unique flavour as well as a real depth of perception, a combination which is not to be found elsewhere in literature.

In the interval between the epics of Homer, which scholars date variously from the tenth to the eighth century B.C., and the age of the three great tragic poets, many advances were made by the peoples who inhabited the Balkan peninsula, the shores of the Aegean Sea and its islands. It is in this epoch that Western philosophical speculation commenced, when thinkers began to explore the various phenomena of the external world, and came to understand many aspects of nature which had hitherto been shrouded in complete mystery. The creative literary activity of this epoch likewise betokens on the part of the Greeks an increasingly higher level of self-understanding and self-consciousness, in the best sense of the word. At this time appeared a group of lyric poets, who were capable of brilliant self-expression. Such writers as Sappho, Alcaeus, and Simonides had looked deeply within their own natures, and through the vehicle of their poetry made abundantly evident how thoroughly they understood the essential character of man's inner being.

Not only did the creators of Greek drama in the fifth century draw

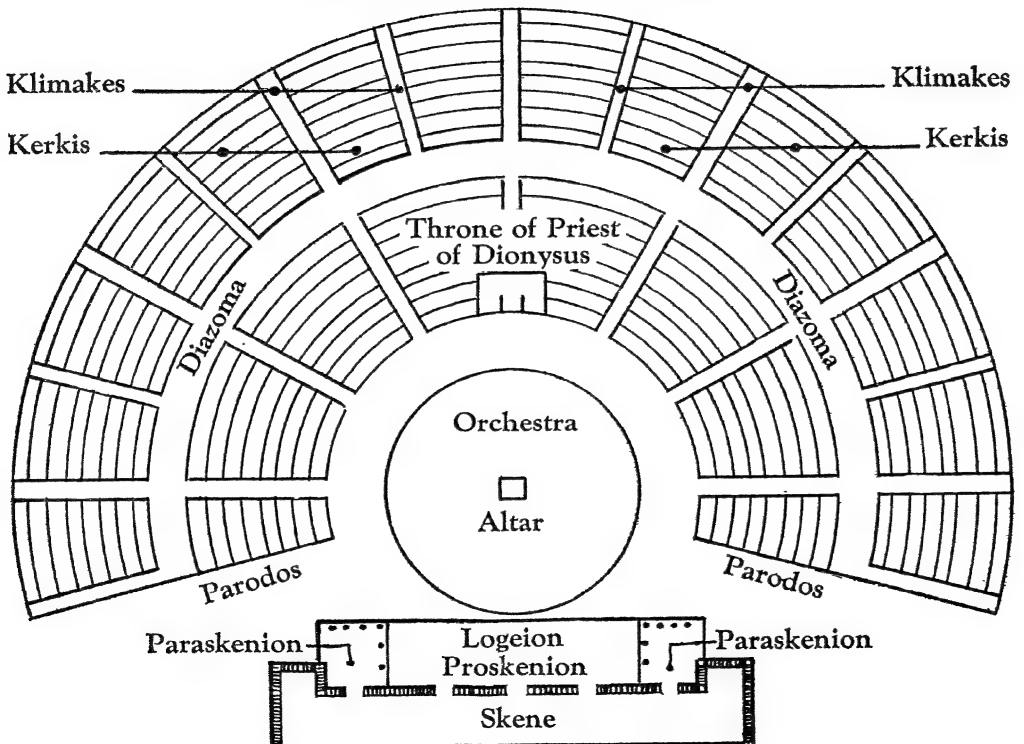
upon this rich literary tradition which was their heritage, but it must also be remembered that the audiences for which these dramatists wrote shared deeply in the inheritance. For the Athenian of the fifth century B.C., poetry was not alone something which would give him insights into life, but it was likewise an integral and meaningful part of his life. In the absence of libraries and books "published" in large numbers, the individual came in contact with "literature," that is, almost exclusively poetry, through oral presentations of the epic, lyric or dramatic forms. He spent long hours hearing this poetry and as a result it became part of his nature. The audiences which witnessed the great tragedies must have been made up of individuals who were thus steeped in poetry, for on no other theory can we explain how plays, replete with choral odes of intricate metrical structure and brilliant imagery, could have been so widely popular.

Most introductions to the reading of Greek tragedy begin with an account of the origins of the form. For the purposes of the general reader, it seems far better to postpone a consideration of this subject until somewhat later, and at the outset rather to stress the fact that in Greek tragedy as we now have it we meet a fully developed dramatic form, which was presented to an audience possessed of a high degree of sophistication, again in the best and purest sense of the word. In the first place, it is absolutely necessary for anyone who desires to apprehend as completely as possible these Greek plays, to re-create them imaginatively as dramas, that is, as actual plays, produced dramatically before an audience. Such an apprehension or understanding can be facilitated, first, by a description of the theatre in which these plays were acted, plus an analysis, external in character, of the actual form of the plays, with particular emphasis upon those features of the Greek plays that differentiate them from dramatic productions with which we are familiar on our own contemporary stage. Having approached the dramas from an external point of view, we shall then be able better to analyze them from the internal point of view, in the effort to determine what is their essential nature, what meaning or meanings they possess as works of art.

A spectator of a Greek dramatic performance in the latter half of the fifth century B.C. would find himself seated in the *theatron,* or *koilon,*

NOTE. The diagram opposite, which was prepared by Professor A. M. Friend, of the Department of Art and Archaeology in Princeton University, does not reproduce any particular ancient theatre. It is, hence, a kind of "ideal" diagram, which should make clear the relationships which the several elements of the theatre bear to each other. It combines in it material drawn primarily from the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens, and from the famous theatre at Epidaurus. In studying the diagram, reference should be made to the frontispieces of Volume I and Volume II of this book.

THEATRON OR KOILON



a semi-circular, curved bank of seats, resembling in some respects the closed end of a horseshoe stadium. He has climbed up the steps (*klimakes*) to reach his seat, which is in a section (*kerkis*). Probably he has in the process walked along the level aisle (*diazoma*) which divides the lower and the upper parts of the *theatron*. Below him, in the best location in the theatre, is the throne of the priest of Dionysus,[1] who presides in a sense over the whole performance, which, as we shall see later, is essentially religious in character. The *theatron* is large—in fact, the one in Athens, in the Theatre of Dionysus, with its seats banked up on the south slope of the Acropolis, seated approximately 17,000 persons.

The spectator sees before him a level circular area called the *orchestra*, which means literally the "dancing place" (deriving from the Greek verb, ὀρχεῖσθαι, to dance). In the centre of the *orchestra* stands an altar, which figures frequently as a stage-property in a number of the plays. A part of the dramatic action will take place in the *orchestra*, as well as the manoeuvres and dance figures performed by the Chorus as they present their odes. To the right and left of the *theatron* are the *paradoi*, which are used not only by the spectators for entering and leaving the theatre, but also for the entrances and exits of actors and the Chorus.

Directly beyond the circular *orchestra* lies the *skene* or scene building.[2] At first, and probably during the balance of the fifth century B.C. the *skene* was a wooden structure, which later gave way to a permanent stone building, after its form became sufficiently stabilized. In most plays the *skene* represents the façade of a house, a palace, or a temple. Various devices [3] were developed from time to time which made it possible to denote to the audience the nature of the building or general background which the *skene* was supposed to represent. By the use of these devices likewise changes of scene could be effected in the relatively few instances in the plays which demand such treatment. The *skene* normally had three doors which served as additional entrances and exits for the actors. Immediately in front of the scene-building was a level platform, in the fifth century B.C. in all probability only a single step above the level of the *orchestra*. This was called the *proskenion* or

[1] Cf. Aristophanes, *The Frogs*, line 294, where the poet has his character, Dionysus, rush over to address the priest.

[2] In some of the earliest plays this was probably not used at all. Cf. the frontispiece to Volume I.

[3] The exact nature of these devices is very difficult to determine. They may have been painted panels, which were movable. In the later theatres there were *periakti*, or revolving prisms, set in the wall of the *skene*. Each of the three sides of the *periaktus* was painted differently. By turning them about, a change of scene could easily be indicated.

logeion where much of the dramatic action of the plays takes place, though of course in many instances the actors descended into the *orchestra,* and on occasions appeared upon the roof of the *skene.* Flanking the *proskenion* were two projecting wings, the so-called *paraskenia.* It must be remembered that the *skene,* since at first it was only a wooden structure, was flexible in its form, and was probably modified frequently.

Dramatic productions of the fifth century B.C. involved the use of two mechanical devices, with which the student of Greek drama should be familiar. In the first place, the open-air theatre with its background of the *skene,* imposed a strict limitation upon the playwright in his choice of the scenes which he wished to present on the stage in his drama. They had to be only those which reasonably and convincingly could take place out of doors, normally in front of the house, palace, or temple, as the case might be. Interior scenes therefore were practically impossible to present. Hence, to overcome this difficulty, a mechanical device, called the *eccyclema,* was developed in the fifth century. It was some kind of platform on wheels, which, so far as we can discover, was rolled out from the *skene,* and in this position was supposed to represent an interior scene.[4] Euripides and Aristophanes seem to have used the *eccyclema* more frequently than the other dramatists whose plays we possess.

The other mechanical device which often appears in the dramas is the μηχανή or "machine." Frequently at the close of a play the dramatist introduced a god into the action, who would naturally be expected to appear from above. He apparently was brought in by some kind of a crane or derrick, called the "machine." Inasmuch as the god who was thus introduced usually served to disentangle the complicated threads of the dramatic action, and on occasions seemed to be brought in quite gratuitously by a playwright unable to work out a dénouement from elements already in the situation, the term *deus ex machina,* "the god from the machine," has become standard in dramatic criticism. It possesses regularly a pejorative connotation, and refers to awkward, mechanical, and unconvincing means which a playwright is forced to employ if he cannot work out a satisfactory resolution to his plot. In the ancient productions, we can reasonably imagine that some violence was done to the audience's sense of realism whenever a god was brought in by the "machine," but we must not forget that scenery and "realism" did not figure so largely in the ancient theatre as they do normally on the present stage. Be it said, however, that the ancients were not unaware

[4] Philologists and archaeologists have not been able to discover exactly what the *eccyclema* was. However, there seems to be no doubt that it was used in the production of plays in the fifth century B.C.

that the "machine" could be embarrassingly awkward, as the famous scene in Aristophanes' *Peace* adequately indicates, when Trygaeus is hoisted aloft, riding on the back of a huge beetle.

In Athens of the fifth century B.C. dramas were presented only on two occasions, both of which marked religious festivals. At other times plays were presented at rural festivals in various Greek communities, when the productions, so to speak, would "go on the road." In the city, the less important of the festivals, called the *Lenaea,* or Festival of the Wine-Press, was held in January/February of each year. In general this occasion was devoted to the presentation of comedies, though some tragedies were also produced. The more important festival, however, was the so-called *Greater* or *City Dionysia,* which was celebrated annually in March/April in honour of the god, Dionysus. Large audiences attended the festival, and witnessed the various performances. The spectators apparently were always in holiday mood, but on the whole maintained good order, though they felt themselves free to express their approval or disapproval by clapping, shouting, hissing, and kicking their heels against the benches. It was not unheard of to throw fruit at bad performers, and there is even a case on record of a poor actor who was almost stoned to death by his dissatisfied public.[5] Earlier in the century admission to the performances was free, but later the cost was two obols, which would be refunded by the State to anyone who could show legitimate need.

Three contests for poets were held in the *Greater Dionysia,* one in comedy, one in tragedy, and one in the dithyramb. Prior to the Peloponnesian War the festival apparently lasted six days. On the first took place the great ceremonial procession which was followed on the second by the competition for the dithyrambic choruses. The dithyramb was an elaborate choral ode sung and performed by a trained chorus of fifty, the song itself having a direct bearing upon the central religious orientation of the whole festival and its connection with the god, Dionysus. Ten dithyrambs were presented in the contest on this day. Five comic poets each submitted a play for the competition in comedy which occupied the third day. Three tragic poets each submitted a tetralogy for the contest in tragedy which filled the last three days of the festival. A tragic poet had to present a group of four plays, three of them tragedies, either on separate themes or all on the same subject, plus a somewhat lighter after-piece known as a satyr-play.[6] During the days of the Peloponnesian War, 431–404 B.C., probably as a war measure, the festival was reduced from six to five days in length, and the number of

[5] On the audience, cf. G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (Boston, 1920) pp. 80–83.

[6] Cf. the introduction to Euripides' *The Cyclops.*

comic competitors was diminished from five to three. During these years, the program for the last three days contained a tragic tetralogy in the morning followed by a comedy in the afternoon.[7]

Great care and expense went into the individual dramatic productions. The poet himself in many instances superintended or directed his own play, or on certain occasions even acted in it. In all probability he helped select his cast, all the parts of which were taken by male actors, coached them and supervised the training of the Chorus. Normally in the tragedies there were not more than three actors for each play, any one of whom might take more than one part if the exigencies of the piece demanded it. A wealthy citizen stood the cost of a play's production, a responsibility which was placed upon him by the State, and was regarded as a legitimate obligation of his position and citizenship.

The tragedies that were thus presented were elaborate and complicated works of art. They combined within them many variegated elements: rhythm in the spoken or recited poetry, vivid action, and brilliant colour. There was also the music which accompanied the choral odes, to our ears at least, strangely melodic, rather than harmonic. The plays included both solo and choral singing, plus a strikingly posed and highly stylized dancing. A further effect was added by the fact that the actors all wore masks. This may have been partially because the audience was so far removed from the actors that it was impossible to achieve any effects through facial expressions. The mask also tended to fix the dominating trait of any character in the minds of the audience, and at the same time to elevate the characters, to make them effectively and significantly unreal, and in some way to raise them above the audience. For much the same reasons the actors wore the *cothurnus,* or the high-soled tragic boot, which increased their stature and added to their impressiveness.

The typical Greek tragedy is divided into certain definite parts. The play opens with a *prologue,* a scene in which a single character may speak, or a dialogue may take place. In some of the plays of Euripides, an opening monologue almost functions as a program with program notes in a modern theatre. In general in this short introductory scene, the poet acquaints the audience with the requisite information concerning the dramatic situation of the play.

After the *prologue* comes the *parodos,* the first appearance of the Chorus. The members of this group enter the *orchestra,* singing and dancing, clearly suiting the rhythm of their motion and their gesticu-

[7] Readers may be referred to J. T. Allen, "On the Program of the City Dionysia during the Peloponnesian War," *University of California Publications in Classical Philology,* XII (1938) pp. 35–42, a number of whose views have here been adopted.

lations to the gravity and import of the words they sing. As time passes in the fifth century the Chorus in tragedy steadily diminishes in importance. At first, it is closely bound up with the play's action, as, for example, in *The Suppliants* of Aeschylus, but in Euripides, particularly in his later plays, the Chorus merely sings lyrical interludes which have little or no coherence with the play. Normally the members of the Chorus serve as interested commentators upon the action, sometimes functioning as a background of public opinion against which the situation of the particular play is projected, or again becoming the vehicle whereby the poet is able to make clearer the more universal significance of the action. The Chorus in Aeschylus and Sophocles, to a greater extent than in Euripides, notably seems to serve this latter function and as such embodies the very essence of their plays.[8] At the conclusion of the *parodos,* the Chorus almost always remains "on the stage," so to speak, throughout the remainder of the play. In the tragedies there are usually fifteen members in the Chorus. One of this number normally acts as a leader who may do solo singing and dancing, or may become virtually another character in the *dramatis personae.* Sometimes the Chorus breaks into two groups which sing responsively.[9]

As soon as the opening choral song has been completed, there comes the first *episode.* This is the exact counterpart of the act or scene in a modern play. Usually it contains a dialogue, but rarely in the Greek tragedies are there more than three participants in it. A *stasimon* or choral ode succeeds the *episode* and the remainder of the piece is made up of these two parts in alternation. A normal play contains four or five of each. On occasion a *commus* takes the place of a *stasimon.* The *commus* is a lyric passage, sung by an actor or actors together with the Chorus. Intricate metres distinguish the *stasimon* and *commus,* whereas the spoken passages of dialogue or monologue in the *episodes* are written in the iambic trimeter, a close equivalent to the iambic pentameter or blank verse in English. After the series of *episodes* and *stasima,* there

[8] This statement does not apply exclusively to all the plays of Euripides. Notable exceptions may be found, for example, in the *Medea* and *The Bacchae.*

[9] It is possible in translation to give only an incomplete impression of the highly complicated rhythmic and metric structure of the choral passages. Suffice it to say that they had a carefully articulated and balanced symmetry of constituent parts, for which there were certain conventions. These conventions were formulated with enough flexibility to allow for great variety of individual treatment. The *strophe* is balanced by the *antistrophe*; the pair is sometimes followed by an *epode.* This basic pattern is varied on occasion by the use of repeated refrains and similar devices. The divisions of the choral passages are indicated insofar as possible in the various translations printed herewith.

is the finale or *exodos,* the closing scene of the play at the end of which the Chorus leaves the view of the audience by way of the *parodoi.*

It can be readily seen that all these several elements in the Greek tragedy are brought together into a dramatic synthesis which in many ways resembles the modern opera, though of course the opera does not have the long sustained passages of spoken dialogue. However, it is most important for the reader of Greek tragedy, if he hopes to apprehend these plays imaginatively, never to forget that rhythmic movement, sound, song, and music are integral to the art form.

The foregoing description of the Greek theatre and the analysis of the form of the Greek tragedies themselves have been primarily external in character. An attempt to analyze these plays from the internal point of view, to discover that which constitutes their inner essence, is by its very nature a far more difficult task. Such an attempt seems to raise a series of questions which must be faced. First, how did Greek tragedy arise? What in its prior history in some measure goes to explain those essential inner characteristics, or qualities which any reader of the plays readily and inevitably recognizes? Second, what did Aristotle, the most influential and in many ways the most important critic of antiquity, think about tragedy and its nature? And third, and most difficult of all, what generically and basically is tragedy?

Perhaps it is best to approach the internal analysis of Greek tragedy from the historical point of view, that is, by looking at its origins, insofar as they may be recovered, to derive certain clues concerning its inner character. The problem of the origin of tragedy has been a subject of endless debate on the part of scholars, and as a result a great number of divergent theories have been advanced. There seems to be evidence for the relatively early existence of the dithyramb, a hymn sung in honour of Dionysus by a chorus dressed at satyrs. Apparently from this early form the dithyramb such as was presented in the fifth century festivals developed. In this later form, the dithyramb did not contain anything of the "satyric" in it. Likewise from the early form emerged the satyr-play such as was produced as the fourth lighter after-piece in the tragic tetralogy. Scholars seem to be in general agreement also that tragedy grew out of this same dithyrambic origin. There is, however, no agreement as to the precise way in which these forms developed.

It seems reasonable to conjecture that all three, tragedy, satyr-play, and later dithyramb, had a common and close association with the spring festivals which were held to celebrate the worship of Dionysus. This god, as one of the Greek anthropomorphic divinities, symbolised the spirit of fertility, of generation and regeneration, which marks the season of spring, and he also came to be identified with the vine. The steps by which the tragedy, as we know it, came into being may have been

somewhat as follows: first, in the early "satyric" dithyramb, the leader of the chorus was separated from his fellows and began during the course of the hymn to carry on quasi-dialogue or conversation with them. The song probably contained a large element of narrative, with a theme bearing on some event connected directly with Dionysus. Next probably came the step of impersonation, when the chorus leader assumed the rôle of some character in the song. It seems reasonable to suppose that this rudimentary dramatic form now became distinct from the dithyramb proper, which carried on an independent existence. In the dramatic form, however, after the step of impersonation had been taken, new themes were probably introduced which were not necessarily connected with Dionysus. After this point we apparently are on firmer ground, as Aristotle tells us that Aeschylus added the second actor, lessened the importance of the Chorus, and that Sophocles in his turn added the third actor.

The theory, as it has been outlined, seems plausible, though of course we must remember that it is highly conjectural. At least we are certain that the three forms, tragedy, satyr-play, and dithyramb, were separate and distinct in the fifth century B.C. Furthermore, it seems very likely that they had a common origin. Exactly how they became separated in all probability may never be known, but it is reasonable to infer that as they began to achieve independent existences they continued to exert influence upon one another. It may be that the later dithyramb as well as the elevated epic tradition contributed largely to the deep seriousness, lofty scale, and magnitude which tragedy ultimately assumed.[10]

For our present purposes there is no need to probe further into the origins of Greek tragedy. Two important conclusions can be drawn which should help us in our analysis of the inner character of these plays. In the first place, we are in a position to understand the importance of the Chorus when we realize that the tragedy virtually grew around it as a centre. The plays would never have had the peculiar inner quality which they do possess if in their origins there had not been a strong lyrico-choral element. And secondly, we find by looking into its prior history, that Greek tragedy had its origin in religion. After all, the dithyramb had as its function religious ritual; it was created for the purpose of doing honour to the god and was a part of his worship. We must not

[10] For the vexed question of the origin of tragedy, readers are referred to the following books: G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (Boston, 1920); A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford, 1927); R. C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama*, 4th ed. (Chicago, 1936); and Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton, 1938). The relevant passages for the problem in Aristotle are to be found in the earlier sections of the *Poetics*, particularly Chapter IV.

forget that even in the fifth century the dramatic performances in the *Greater Dionysia* were still an integral part of a very elaborate religious service. The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens lay within the sacred precinct of the god. The very altar in the centre of the *orchestra* was not primarily a stage property, though the dramatists sometimes took advantage of its presence there, but it was a real religious altar. Behind the *skene* were temples dedicated to the god. Hence it is no wonder that the Greek drama tends to be more religious than secular. In certain respects it seems even to resemble the mediaeval mystery play. On the basis then of its prior history we can easily see why Greek tragedy in its inner essence is serious, solemn, and "poetic," and why it characteristically is preoccupied with fundamental religious problems—the nature of God or the gods, the relationship of the human and the divine, or the nature of God's ways to man.

The most important document to come out of antiquity concerning Greek tragedy is of course the justly famous *Poetics* of Aristotle. No reader of these Greek plays should fail to consult this most extraordinary piece of critical writing. Aristotle possessed perhaps the best analytical mind that has ever been known, and when in the course of his studies he sought to explain the nature of these great Greek plays, he brought to bear all his powers upon his problem. In the *Poetics,* though it was written some fifty or seventy-five years after the heyday of Greek tragedy, Aristotle devotes himself almost exclusively to this form of art.

Upon analysis Aristotle concludes that there are in tragedy six basic elements which he calls Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Song. However, preliminary to his whole study in the *Poetics,* he introduces the conception of *mimesis,* or "imitation," which Plato had already used before him, as fundamental to the phenomena of art. In saying that the artist "imitates" his models, Aristotle does not use the word in its primary sense of "copying," but rather is seeking to give a secondary meaning to the term. By the word he seems to mean the process which takes place when an artist creates his work of art. It is through *mimesis* that form comes to be imposed upon the artist's material, broadly conceived. Aristotle insists that "poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature of universals, whereas those of history are singulars." [11] Hence poetry "imitates" universals, and the process of *mimesis* produces a resultant work of art in which the "universal" aspect constitutes the very essence. Aristotle classifies the six basic elements according to the rôle each of them occupies in the process of artistic "imitation." He maintains that Diction and Song refer to the medium of "imitation,"

[11] *Poetics,* Chapter IX, Bywater's translation.

Spectacle to the manner of "imitation," while Plot, Character, and Thought refer to the objects of "imitation." Of the six elements Aristotle holds that Plot is the most important, with Character second.

An acquaintance with these six elements and with the Aristotelian conception of *mimesis* are necessary preliminaries to an understanding of his famous definition of tragedy. Aristotle defines it in these words: "Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these and similar emotions." [12] Aristotle's analysis and definition contain much that is valuable for one who is endeavouring to comprehend the inner nature of Greek tragedy. First, in his analysis of the elements he has shown that the dramatic synthesis is rich and complicated. He likewise properly emphasizes the elements of Plot and Character. Second, in the definition he insists upon its essential seriousness, its completeness, that is, its unity as an artistic whole, and its "magnitude," that is, its scale and elevation, which in some way raises it above the ordinary run of things human. Furthermore, he indicates what he believes the function of tragedy to be, the *catharsis*, or "proper purgation" of pity, fear, and similar emotions. Scholars have argued at great length over the precise meaning of *catharsis*. For our present purposes it is enough to note that Aristotle believes that tragedy by its very nature arouses, stimulates, involves or "purges" in the spectator the emotions of pity, fear and their like. Tragedy hence must have in its inner essence a peculiar quality which always produces these particular emotional responses.

One more conception of Aristotle in the *Poetics*, his theory of the ideal tragic hero and the "tragic flaw," merits our attention. Probably in the criticism of tragedy no other theory has received such wide acceptance. It is very frequently used, of course, in the criticism of Shakespeare's tragedies. We hear much of Macbeth and his overwhelming ambition, of Othello and his jealousy. It must be said that the theory has often led to superficial and over-simplified critical opinions, to the notion that, if one has discovered the hero's "tragic flaw," he has satisfactorily apprehended and comprehended the particular tragedy in question. Aristotle states his theory in Chapter XIII of the *Poetics*. He says that tragedy must involve a change of fortune for a character, but this personage cannot be a completely virtuous man passing from fortune to misfortune, because this would be simply odious to the spectator. Nor can it involve a bad man passing from misery to happiness, because this would out-

[12] *Poetics*, Chapter VI, Butcher's translation, with a slight modification.

rage our human feelings, our moral sense, and accordingly no appropriate tragic emotions would be aroused within us. Nor again can it involve a bad man passing from happiness to misery. Perhaps this would satisfy the moral sense, but it again would not arouse in us the appropriate tragic emotions. Hence Aristotle defines the ideal tragic hero in these words: "A man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty." [13]

There are several points to be particularly noted concerning Aristotle's conception of tragedy. First of all, he emphasizes the human element and insists implicitly that tragedy involves human beings. Second, he emphasizes the single individual in his argument concerning the tragic hero. Furthermore, he recognizes in human life states of happiness and misery, fortune and misfortune, in and out of which men pass. Here also he both implicitly and explicitly rejects the mechanical conception of "poetic justice," that the good prosper and the evil suffer. Aristotle likewise assumes the existence of some kind of moral order in the universe, as well as, by implication, the element of chance or luck, which may be possibly extended to include fate or destiny. In summary, then, for Aristotle tragedy is serious and elevated. It involves emotions of a particular sort. It looks at man and his states, in a world in which there is an element of chance or fate, but in which, at least so far as man himself is concerned, there is a definite moral order in some sort, and not moral chaos.

Anyone who reads tragedy of any sort must ultimately face the question, "What, after all, is tragedy?" Aristotle's answer to this question has been outlined. As one reads the Greek tragedies for the first time, he gradually formulates his critical opinions concerning them. More often than not the reader will take his conception of Shakespearean tragedy and apply it as a critical foot-rule to the Greek examples and judge accordingly. This method is at bottom unsound, as it would be if the process were reversed, that is, if one judged the tragedies of Shakespeare according to criteria derived solely from Greek tragedy. What is needed, therefore, is some kind of generic conception of tragedy, based upon empirical data drawn from all sources to which the terms "tragedy" or "the tragic" have been applied, under which all the various species may be subsumed. Only on these conditions will judgments of value, either single or comparative, be based upon a sound foundation.

Before attempting to outline such a generic conception of tragedy, it might be well to consider for a moment A. C. Bradley's famous interpretation of Shakespearean tragedy. In the beginning of his analysis

[13] This translation is indebted both to Butcher and Bywater.

Bradley maintains that tragedy is a story of human actions producing exceptional calamity and ending in the death of a man in high estate.[14] He further argues that the hero is usually a good man, certainly one who possesses qualities of greatness or nobility; in short, he is not mean or contemptible or small. The catastrophe which befalls this hero, in Bradley's view, gives one the dominating impression of waste. Furthermore, the critic holds that in these plays all human activity takes place in a world that has as its predominating feature a moral order which is good. Somehow or other, in some mysterious way, this "fate" or moral order reacts violently and convulsively against all infractions thereof. From this reaction comes the calamity, which is often far out of proportion with the infraction, and also from this arises the terrific waste. Such, very briefly, is Bradley's interpretation, and it must be remembered that he is specifically confining himself to Shakespearean tragedy.

It is obvious that Greek and Shakespearean tragedy have certain elements in common, as well as certain specific differences. Hence any general theory of tragedy must be of wide enough scope to include within it these two types, which represent the very best in the tragic literature of Western Europe. Furthermore, any effort to get at the essence of tragedy or "the tragic" must not confine itself to the limitation of the dramatic form. Also, as a preliminary to an analysis of the tragic, it is expedient to rule out, for the moment at least, the world of nature and experience. Let us not now take into consideration railroad wrecks, automobile accidents, cyclones, earthquakes, and all other such occurrences which insurance companies in their policies so curiously label "acts of God." Hence in the coming analysis we shall only be concerned with tragedy or the tragic in literature.[15]

Perhaps at the outset it will be best to proceed by defining negatively, that is, by indicating first as clearly as possible that which tragedy is not. Tragedy is not the sheerly horrible, which provokes only revulsion and loathing, although horror may be an aspect of tragedy. Next, it does not appear to the purely pathetic or pitiful. This provokes a kind of patronizing pity, where the object may be scorned or held contemptible. Conversely, tragedy seems to focus our attention on a level above ourselves, and yet at the same time it involves pity or sympathy in some sort, as Aristotle clearly saw. Again, tragedy is not the purely terrible or terrifying, which provokes stark fright, the characteristic reaction to sheer melodrama. However, the terrible or the fearful may well become an element in the tragic, again as Aristotle clearly saw.

[14] Cf. *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd ed. (London, 1932) p. 16.

[15] It is only for convenience that we are confining ourselves to literature. If the analysis is sound at all, it can be applied to the other artistic media which are capable of expressing "the tragic."

Now we are in a position to attempt a positive formulation. Tragedy or the tragic always makes certain basic assumptions. In the first place, it always seems to assume the fundamental dignity and worth of man. It assumes that somehow or other human life is meaningful and valuable. It would never finally accept Macbeth's evaluation of life:

> It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

It follows, therefore, that tragedy must concern itself with human values of many sorts, man's happiness and misery, and all that these conceptions involve.

As a corollary to this first assumption there is a second which tragedy always appears to make. It assumes that, complex though man be, he possesses a will, in some sense a will that is free, and that he is likewise in some sense responsible for his actions. The tragic asserts that man is somehow free to choose his course of action and that through his free choice, his character is essentially revealed. For the present argument it makes no difference whether man actually has free will or not—whether certain philosophers and psychologists are right in denying free will to man, or whether Dr. Johnson said the last word on the problem when he remarked, "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience for it." [16] Whatever may be the actual answer to the problem, tragedy, or the tragic assumes that man has free will, and when one finds himself in the realm of the tragic, it can only be meaningful to him if he realizes that tragedy has made that assumption. If man is portrayed as a complete puppet, even though at times it may seem so, if the blinded Gloucester in *King Lear* is right when he cries,

> As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,
> They kill us for their sport.

—then there can be no tragedy. If man is a puppet, then he is mean, contemptible, and nothing worth. But tragedy in its entirety, even when it portrays man as he is swept to his doom by blind forces over which he has no control, seems to affirm that he is not mean and not contemptible.

The other assumption which tragedy seems consistently to make is that over and above man there exists some superhuman power or force. This force appears under various names and in different forms. In Bradley's interpretation of Shakespeare's essentially secular tragedy, it is the mysterious "moral order." In the essentially religious Greek tragedy

[16] Cf. P. E. More, *The Sceptical Approach to Religion* (Princeton, 1934) p. 27.

it is represented by the gods or the vaguer personifications of supernatural powers. Elsewhere, it may be the Christian God or Fate or Destiny. Call it any name one will, tragedy always presents man as living under something divine or superhuman which partially determines his actions.

It may be argued then that these are the three basic assumptions of tragedy: first, the dignity of man, second, the freedom of his will and his responsibility for the use which he makes of that will, and third, the existence in the universe of a superhuman factor. It may be further suggested that, having made these assumptions, tragedy is fundamentally oriented towards the problem of evil, either explicitly or implicitly. It faces squarely the fact of evil in the world, that there is misery in man's life, which is a life to be ended by the mystery of death. Sometimes tragedy grapples directly with the problem as is the case in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and *Oresteia*. Perhaps it is because of their direct attack upon the essence of evil that these plays achieve a scale and universality never reached in Shakespeare. Sometimes the orientation is more implicit, as it is in Euripides' *Hippolytus,* for example, or in *Hamlet,* or *Othello,* or *Oedipus the King,* or *The Bacchae*. The action of all these plays illustrates the working of one aspect of evil or another, and provides in a sense material out of which one can construct some terms upon which the fact of evil can be faced. Therefore, rather than maintain with Aristotle and Bradley that tragedy occurs only in connection with a tragic hero and his "tragic flaw," it seems better to insist upon a wider scope, a genus which will include the Aristotelian type as one of its most important species, namely, that tragedy makes the three assumptions with respect to man's life, and then places him over against the everlasting and eternally mysterious question of evil. Then and only then does tragedy arise, but it is important to note that this does not mean utter defeat for man, since the first assumption is that man's life is meaningful. That there is not utter defeat in true tragedy seems to be at the very core of Horatio's last lines of farewell to Hamlet:

> Now cracks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince,
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

And may it not be that there are those who seek to interpret life, make the three assumptions of the tragic, face the problem of evil, and call life a tragedy, but never defeat?

Of the many writers of Greek tragedy only Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are represented in the collection of plays which have survived, and even this collection includes but a small fraction of the total number of dramas which these men wrote. Aeschylus, the earliest of the three,

was born of a rather prominent family in Athens in 525 B.C., at a time long before the city had achieved much distinction among the peoples of the Greek area. Of his life we possess but the scantiest information, most of it deriving from a short biographical sketch which is prefixed to one of the manuscripts of his plays. In addition to this sketch, scattered references in other sources acquaint us with several legendary traditions which grew up concerning the poet's life. For example, we are told that while Aeschylus was a boy, the god Dionysus appeared to him in a dream and commanded him to write tragedies. There was also a tradition, probably arising from the religious and philosophical character of his plays, that he was a Pythagorean, a member of that curious philosophical, religious, and scientific brotherhood. He was also said to have been an initiate in the Eleusinian mysteries, and at one time was supposed to have been accused of impiety for having divulged the secrets of the cult.

Aeschylus first competed in the dramatic contests in Athens in 499 B.C. He achieved his first victory in 484 B.C. and continued from then on to be highly successful in the theatre. Aside from his dramatic activity, he apparently gained distinction in military affairs, having fought both at Marathon and Salamis. In all, he wrote approximately ninety plays, of which only seven have survived. We are told that he won first prizes in competition on thirteen occasions, his last victory occurring in 458 B.C. with his great trilogy, the *Oresteia*. He died in 455 B.C. while in Sicily, where he had gone shortly after his final tragic competition. It should be noted that Aeschylus in the latter part of his life must have been a direct witness of Athens' breath-taking ascent to supremacy in the Greek world during those years.

One reads Aeschylus' plays in their chronological order, and is immediately impressed by the great advances successively made in his dramatic technique. As we move from *The Suppliants,* where the Chorus figures so largely, on through *The Seven Against Thebes,* in which a "tragic hero" appears for the first time, down to the *Oresteia,* with its fully developed dramaturgy, we can see the steady growth of the poet's technical powers. If Aristotle is correct in saying that Aeschylus added the second actor, the poet must have been keenly aware of the dramatic potentialities of the somewhat rudimentary form in which he was working. Again if Aristotle is right in saying that Sophocles added the third actor, when we look at the *Oresteia,* we can see how quick Aeschylus was to take effective advantage of the excellent innovation which his younger competitor introduced.

From the seven remaining plays much can be discovered concerning the quality of Aeschylus' thought and the elevation of his style. The loftiness of Aeschylean language and imagery is most notable, even

though on some occasions the poet comes dangerously near bombast, a fact on which Aristophanes capitalized with great comic effect in *The Frogs*. However, Aeschylus' images possess a poetic depth and intensity which could only come from a mind driving deeply into the essence of that which it was seeking to express. Study of his plays immediately reveals that Aeschylus' primary interest is in religion and theology. To be sure, he considers human phenomena, but not on the human level, or as ends in themselves. Aeschylus rather studies human affairs as means of throwing light upon the problems of religion and theology, which he considered more universal and more significant. As a result of this basic orientation as well as the power of his insight, Aeschylus was able to present, at the close of his *Oresteia,* one of the greatest and most purified conceptions of godhead to be found in the writings of Western European civilization.

For general purposes of exposition it seems best to pass by Sophocles for the moment and turn to Euripides, who in many ways lies at the opposite extreme from Aeschylus in his basic interests. In connection with Euripides' life, we are again faced with scanty information. We know that he was born between the years 485 to 480 B.C., that is, approximately fifteen years after Aeschylus began to compete in the dramatic contests. We possess a number of short lives of Euripides which are prefixed to the manuscripts of his plays, as well as a longer fragmentary biography, written by a certain Satyrus in the third century B.C. Most of the information in these biographical sketches derives from the writings of comic poets who seemed to be exceptionally fond of ridiculing Euripides. For example, one common statement in the lives is that Euripides' mother was a purveyor of vegetables, a point which Aristophanes makes in his generally good-humoured raillery at the poet in *The Frogs*. Doubtless because Euripides exhibits in many of his choral passages an awareness of the pictorial, some of his biographers have insisted that he had studied painting. Also because Euripides has been unflinching in the delineation of his feminine characters,[17] the biographers concluded that this could never have happened, had he not had some bitter personal experience with women. Hence tradition has preserved apocryphal stories about his unhappy marital life.

During his lifetime Euripides presented approximately eighty-eight plays, though he wrote in all about ninety-two. In the contests he was successful only four times, probably because his somewhat new and unorthodox views did not find immediate favour with the public. Certainly there is a strong strain of scepticism in his writing, and one be-

[17] This apparently also accounts for Euripides' reputation as a misogynist. Cf., for example, Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae.*

comes aware of the increasing doubt and uncertainty which pervade the plays, particularly those written towards the close of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens, the great city of ante-bellum days, was tottering upon the brink of ruin. Though Euripides' plays were not well received during his life, it is evident that after his death, during the fourth century B.C. and later, he was by far the most popular of the three tragedians. This fact is attested by the number of indubitable plays of Euripides which have been preserved, seventeen tragedies and one satyr-play. Another piece, the *Rhesus,* is also ascribed to the dramatist though its genuineness has been frequently doubted. Despite the many accounts of Euripides' death which have survived, we know nothing definite about it. We do know, however, that he left Athens for the court of King Archelaus of Macedonia in about 408 B.C. and died there in 406 B.C.

Euripides does not rank high as a dramatic technician. Indeed, there is evidence throughout his plays of faulty construction. His greatest claims to fame, however, rest on his superb studies of human problems considered on the human level, his penetrating psychological analyses of his characters, his capacity to create genuine pathos, his sense of the dramatic possibilities of an individual scene, and his ability by means of dramatic innovations to reinterpret the traditional legends upon which all the dramatists relied for their material. Such plays as the *Alcestis* or *Medea* may serve to illustrate his treatment of human problems. They contain, as well, evidence of his power to study psychologically his characters, the excellence of which is likewise evinced in his portrayal of such characters as Phaedra in the *Hippolytus,* Electra in the *Electra,* and many others too numerous to mention. His pathos is perhaps best seen in *The Trojan Women,* while his sense for the dramatic in the individual scene is most evident in his melodramatic plays, such as the *Orestes, Iphigenia in Tauris,* or *Helen.* His reinterpretations of the old material are excellently illustrated by the *Electra* or *The Phoenissae.*

Euripides had a profound influence upon the drama. He seems to have shaken the domination which the traditional sagas exerted upon the playwrights; he reduced the importance of the Chorus, until it only served to provide lyric interludes between actual dramatic scenes, but above all he raised to supreme importance the study of character. Unlike Aeschylus he is not predominantly interested in religion and theology, but rather in ethical problems, in human beings face to face with the pain and evil of human life, as they exhibit now strength and now pathetic weakness. Although he never consistently formulates his ideas concerning the gods or the superhuman elements in the universe, he nevertheless seems to believe that they exist and are relevant to human life in some way or other. *The Bacchae,* enigmatic as it is, seems clearly to affirm this position.

Critics tend to attack him for the inadequate carpentering of his plays. Perhaps his reply would be that he really did not care if he overworked the awkward *deus ex machina,* if at the same time he had been successful in portraying completely the inner states of his characters and their problems, in scenes of individual dramatic intensity. It is therefore easy to see how Euripides broke the ground for the modern drama by his freedom in handling plot and his minute study of character. He may be the inferior of Aeschylus and Sophocles in scale and grandeur, but by virtue of his own particular excellences he laid down the lines along which dramatic art has developed. As one critic has well said, "Remove Euripides and the modern theatre ceases to exist." [18]

There remains to consider Sophocles, the great mediating figure between Aeschylus and Euripides. He was born about 495 B.C., some ten years or so before the birth of Euripides, and lived to the great age of ninety, when he died about 405 B.C., surviving his younger contemporary by approximately a year. The poet's family was wealthy, and he himself served in public office on several occasions. In the main, however, he devoted himself completely to the theatre and in all wrote about one hundred twenty-five plays of which now there are but seven extant, and unfortunately none of these derives from the first twenty-five years of his creative activity. His plays met with wide popular success, as is indicated by his twenty victories in tragic competition. Unlike Euripides, who, as we have already noted, became bitterly disillusioned towards the end of his life, and whose works show evidence of this change of temper, Sophocles in his plays seems to maintain a consistent and firm approach to the problems of tragedy.

Because of his well-nigh perfect craftsmanship as well as his depth of understanding, critics have always found Sophocles most difficult to appraise. They all too often utter empty-sounding clichés on the "calm and serenity" of Sophocles' attitude towards life, and hence they are prone to argue that he lived a serene and calm life himself. They even point to his good fortune in having died before the defeat of Athens. There is much about Sophocles' formulation of life, as it is seen through the medium of his tragedies, that gives foundation for these critical utterances, but we must not forget that the purity and the clarity of the formulation could only have resulted from a deep experience of life that must have been at best difficult. After all Sophocles lived through the same years that brought disillusion to Euripides, but the elder poet apparently had enough strength to hold his views steadily, and to rise above the forces which seem to have broken Euripides' spirit.

Sophocles' mastery of dramatic technique is apparent in all his plays,

[18] D. C. Stuart, *The Development of Dramatic Art* (New York, 1928) p. 100.

most notably, of course, in *Oedipus the King*. Likewise in this tragedy, as well as in such others as the *Ajax* or *Philoctetes* he demonstrated his ability to use with overwhelming effectiveness the device of dramatic irony. But his greatest excellence clearly lies in his general view of life, which can scarcely be communicated in the necessarily conceptual terms of criticism. However, it is most clearly expressed in two great choral odes, one on the wonders of man in the *Antigone* (lines 332–367) and the other on the laws of Heaven in *Oedipus the King* (lines 863–910). In the first of these Sophocles eloquently asserts the dignity, worth and value of man, even though there is death that he cannot conquer. In the second the poet proclaims his belief in a mysterious and powerful force behind the universe which sets and ordains the eternal laws of the world, which are holy, though ultimately incomprehensible to man. These seem to be the two fundamental aspects of Sophocles' view of life: man the marvel working out his own destiny, making his own choices, but under the guidance of Heaven and its everlasting laws. Sophocles concentrates on the continual interaction of these two aspects. So Neoptolemus in the *Philoctetes* struggles, torn by the claims of personal integrity and devotion to his nation. And so struggles Oedipus, who has transgressed unwittingly a law of Heaven, but who through iron and inflexible will endeavours to work out his destiny and to assume his responsibility in a world in which human and divine elements are wholly interfused.

We have maintained that Aeschylus' basic orientation was towards theology and religion. On the other hand, we have insisted that Euripides was predominantly interested in human beings, on the human level, in their psychological states as they face the complex problems of human life. In a curious way Sophocles lies in a mean between these two poets, and seems to combine in himself their outstanding powers. He has the scale of Aeschylus plus Euripides' power of psychological analysis. He studies his human characters psychologically in their human environment, and yet he manages to approach the elevation of Aeschylus. In his plays dealing with the ruling house of Thebes, he analyzes, as Aeschylus did in the *Oresteia,* the phenomenon of a curse upon the house, of sin begetting sin. But in Sophocles there is always present the interplay of the divine and human. He remains on the human level, yet always directs his gaze towards that which is superhuman. It is the miracle of Sophocles' genius which has enabled him to express in his seven extant plays this interpretation of life, so deep and comprehensive that it has rarely if ever been equalled in the creative literature of Western Europe.

W. J. O.

II. Comedy

THE origins and early history of this form of dramatic art are at least as obscure as those of tragedy, and here too the procedure will be to begin with an examination of the documents which we possess and then to deduce what we can concerning their lost antecedents. The prospects of such a study seem at first sight to be very good indeed, for there are many things in the extant comedies of the fifth century that look exceptionally archaic, explicable only as survivals of some elaborate and primitive ritual which should be easy to reconstruct. A closer acquaintance, however, reveals that the problem admits of no very facile or satisfactory solution.

In a number of its broadest aspects the comedy of the fifth century resembles tragedy. It was performed at festivals of Dionysus under the aegis of the Athenian state. Its expenses were met in the same manner as those of tragedy and the rivalry of the poets competing for the prizes was just as keen. It was performed in the same theatre before the same type of audience, by a chorus of about the same size [1] and by an equally limited number of actors. Its structure shows many of the characteristic features of the mature tragic drama, such as *prologue*, *parodos*, and *exodos*, and the main body of both types of play consists of a series of relatively short scenes separated by choral interludes. The *prologues* of fifth-century comedy are not usually composed with much care or skill, and the situation is often explained to the spectators by one of the actors in a long and undramatic speech reminiscent of the Euripidean *prologue*, but we nowhere find a comic *prologue* consisting entirely of such a speech. The comic *parodos* is much more complicated and dramatic than the one usually found in the tragic play, and it contains peculiarities of form that are unknown in tragedy, but these may be more conveniently treated later on. The special interest of the comic *exodos* derives not from its form, which is quite free, but from its contents, and it too may best be considered in another connection. It is in the choral interludes between scenes that the unique features of the form and the structure of comedy are most evident. Whereas in tragedy these performances of the Chorus, for all their differences in contents and in metre, almost invariably have the standardized form of the *stasimon*, in comedy they exhibit astonishing variety and frequent specialization. We shall turn our attention first to the most curious and most highly specialized of these interludes, the *parabasis*.[2]

[1] The actual number was twenty-four.

[2] The extant *parabases* are: *Ach.* 626–718, *Kn.* 498–610, *Clouds* 510–626, *Wasps* 1009–1121, *Peace* 729–817, *Birds* 676–800, *Thesm.* 785–845, *Frogs* 674–737.

The typical fifth-century comedy falls into two well-defined parts, usually of more or less equal length. The first of these we find devoted to the creation of some incongruous situation, the second to the results of this, presented in a series of short scenes that have little dramatic coherence and no development. The function of the *parabasis* is to separate these two sections of the play. At the conclusion of the former the characters leave the stage to attend to some business that has resulted from the new situation, and the Leader of the Chorus wishes them well in a brief "tag" called the *kommation,* which is in some way or other metrically distinguished from the verse in which the preceding scene has been written. The *kommation* is followed by a passage approximately one hundred lines in length which quite interrupts the action of the comedy and is usually divorced from it absolutely, having no essential connection either with what has gone before or with what is to follow. Its dramatic utility is restricted to the creation of verisimilitude with respect to time, and we frequently find that the second part of the play presupposes the lapse of an appreciable interval during the delivery of the *parabasis.*

As soon as the actors have left the stage the Chorus turns and faces the audience while its Leader briefly announces that the *parabasis* will now be delivered. The lines in which this is proclaimed are to be regarded as part of the *kommation,* the function of which will thus be to cover the exits of the actors and the movements of the Chorus. Once these have been completed the Leader addresses the audience directly, speaking as though he were the poet himself, in a passage of varying length called the *anapests,* from the metre in which it is usually composed. The contents of the *anapests* differ widely in the various comedies, but political advice to the Athenian populace and defence by the poet of his literary productions are amongst the most frequent motifs. The normal emotional disposition is a crescendo of excitement, which reaches its culmination in a connected passage several lines in length, delivered at full speed and in one breath, and aptly named *pnigos* or "choker." After the *pnigos* comes one of those astounding changes of mood and manner peculiar to fifth-century comedy and extremely difficult for us to follow. There is a moment of silence; then the First Semi-Chorus sings the *ode,* a relatively short passage in simple lyric metres and not divided into *strophe* and *antistrophe.* The subjects of the *odes* are most frequently religious and the atmosphere is nearly always serious, sometimes even wistful or sad. In them we find some of the finest lyric poetry that Greece has given us. But as we read one of these early comedies and come abruptly from the satirical extravagance of the *pnigos* to the haunting beauty of the *ode* we have to exert ourselves mightily in order to effect the emotional readjustment that is necessary, and we cannot refrain from wondering

at, and perhaps envying, the sensitivity and the flexibility of the Athenian heart.

The lyric moment is brief, and the comic spirit as we understand it soon returns; heralded occasionally by an unexpected incongruity in the last words of the *ode*. The next part of the *parabasis* is called the *epirrheme* and is addressed to the audience by the Leader of the First Semi-Chorus. It is usually about sixteen lines long and its metre is trochaic; it may have been delivered in a sort of recitative style, but the important point is that it was not lyric. Its atmosphere and its subjects are more or less similar to those of the *anapests,* but discussions of literary matters are not usually found. A more significant difference lies in the fact that the sentiments expressed are, ostensibly at least, those of the Chorus rather than of the poet. At the conclusion of the *epirrheme* we are called upon to readjust our emotions again, for the Second Semi-Chorus now sings the *antode,* which is quite similar to the *ode* in mood and manner and responds to it metrically just as *strophe* to *antistrophe* in the tragic *stasimon*. The final portion of the *parabasis* necessitates a third emotional revolution, and the *antepirrheme* brings us back once again to the "comic" atmosphere. It is delivered by the Leader of the Second Semi-Chorus and its subjects are similar to those of the *epirrheme;* it is in the same trochaic metre and contains the same number of lines. As soon as the *antepirrheme* has been delivered the characters return to the stage and the second part of the comedy begins.

Such is the *parabasis* of the early Greek comedy. In its complete form it contains seven parts, which fall into two groups. The first three, *kommation, anapests,* and *pnigos,* are called the *hapla* (simple) because they exhibit no strophic responsion. As a group they occur only in the *parabasis*. The last four parts, however, *ode, epirrheme, antode,* and *antepirrheme,* constitute a structure known as the *epirrhematic syzygy,* which is frequently found in all parts of fifth-century comedy and must be regarded as the most significant and characteristic formal peculiarity of this branch of the Greek drama. As represented in the *parabasis* the *epirrhematic syzygy* is incomplete; in the full form the *epirrheme* culminates in a *pnigos* and the *antepirrheme* in an *antipnigos*. On the other hand the exact responsion of *epirrheme* and *antepirrheme* in the *parabasis* is but seldom encountered elsewhere. Both of these facts are indicative of the great flexibility and adaptability of the *epirrhematic syzygy,* and its many and varied uses consistently illustrate the principle that strictness of form in the *syzygy* is in inverse ratio to the dramatic values of the scene in which it is employed. The omission of the two *pnige* in the *parabasis* is undoubtedly due to the fact that the *hapla* already contain one such passage; three of them would be

a bit too much. But in the other uses of the *syzygy* these *pnige* are, for dramatic reasons, absent as often as present, and we may therefore regard them, not as essential features of the *syzygy*, but rather as a kind of specialized appendage to the *epirrhemes*. The *syzygy* can thus be studied primarily in the form in which we find it in the *parabasis*, and the most important feature of it is that it contains four parts, of which two are lyric and two are not, arranged in an alternate or interlocking system of responsion peculiar to comedy and quite different from the successive responsion characteristic of the tragic *stasimon*.

Inequality in number of lines in the *epirrhemes* is not the only respect in which the *syzygy* exhibits variation as it is adapted to different dramatic needs. In the *parabasis* the *ode* always comes first, but elsewhere we find the *epirrheme* in this position, and occasionally the order is *ode epirrheme antepirrheme antode*. In the *parabasis* the metre of the *epirrhemes* is always trochaic, but elsewhere we find a number of other kinds of verse employed, and sometimes the *antepirrheme* is in a metre different from that of the *epirrheme*. In the *parabasis* the *epirrhemes* are always delivered by the Leaders of the Semi-Choruses, but elsewhere this is often done by the actors, and in many of these cases the *epirrhemes* consist of dialogue in which as many as four speakers may take part. The non-lyric members of the *syzygy* are thus susceptible of manifold variation, and it is on this that the adaptability of the whole structure depends. The *ode* and the *antode* exhibit a consistent rigidity of formal structure, and the principle of exact responsion is never violated. Such was the power of the convention which governed the composition of all choral lyric poetry. An approach to adaptation of the lyric parts of the *syzygy* to dramatic needs is seen in a few cases in which the rendition is divided between the Chorus and one of the actors, but such exceptional instances provide additional evidence of the strength of the tradition of strict responsion, for the distribution of lines is always exactly the same in both *ode* and *antode*.

Such are the forms which the *epirrhematic syzygy* can assume; we may now proceed to an examination of the uses to which it is put. Functionally the *parabasis* is nothing but the most specialized and most undramatic of the choral interludes in comedy. In view of the fact that an analysis of its structure reveals it to be merely a strictly formal *syzygy* with its own peculiar *hapla* prefixed, we might reasonably expect that most of the other choral interludes would be *syzygies* of a less rigid construction, lacking any additional features. Interludes of this sort do indeed occur,[3] but it is noteworthy that they are almost as undramatic

[3] *Kn.* 1264–1315, *Wasps* 1265–1291, *Peace* 1127–1190 (with both *pnige*), *Birds* 1058–1117.

as the *parabasis* itself; their subject matter is just as thoroughly divorced from the action of the play, and the *epirrhemes* are delivered by the Leader of the Chorus or the Leaders of the Semi-Choruses. Furthermore, it is not improbable that the Chorus turned and faced the audience on such occasions, for traces of the *kommation* sometimes appear. On the formal side we find exact responsion in the *epirrhemes*, which sometimes culminates in *pnige*. Such *syzygies* may, with reference to their contents and structure, be called *hypoparabases*, but in the economy of the drama their function is that of the *stasimon* in tragedy; they are in this respect quite unspecialized, since they serve to separate, not the two halves of the play, but merely two individual scenes in it. Such *syzygies* occur only in the latter halves of those comedies in which they are found at all.

In choral interludes of this anticipated type the adaptation of the *epirrhematic syzygy* to dramatic requirements is very slight. Usually we can observe a more elaborate adaptation, in which the functions of two successive tragic *stasima* are assumed by the *ode* and the *antode* of a *syzygy;* the scenes thus defined are composed in pairs, and even though they are dialogue, with two or more speakers, and are written in iambic trimeters, they are essentially and formally the *epirrhemes* of a *syzygy* which differs from those in the *parabases* chiefly in being really a part of the dramatic economy of the play. As a result of this we find that such *episodic syzygies*, to give them a special term, are far less rigid in the formal features of their *epirrhemes*, and exact responsion is hardly ever observable. Really violent inequalities, however, very seldom occur, and even a maximum adaptation to dramatic requirements and a minimum strictness of form cannot entirely conceal the kinship of such pairs of scenes with the highly conventional *syzygies* which we find in the *parabases*.[4]

The lack of dramatic development in the series of short scenes which follow the *parabasis* makes this portion of the play ideally suited to the composition of *episodic syzygies*, and they are more numerous here than anywhere else, but the *parodos* also frequently contains one or more *syzygies*, which are extensively adapted to the generally dramatic character of this part of the comedy and consequently show little strictness of form in their non-lyric elements. The chief difference between them and the episodic variety is a matter of length; normally those in the *parodos* are relatively short.[5] A further point to be noted is that the relation be-

[4] The *episodic syzygies* are: *Ach.* 346–392, 393–571, 1000–1068; *Kn.* 611–755; *Peace* 819–921, 922–1038; *Birds* 801–902, 1118–1266, 1494–1705; *Frogs* 460–604.

[5] The *parodic syzygies* are: *Ach.* 204–233, 284–346; *Clouds* 263–313; *Wasps* 333–402, 403–525; *Lys.* 254–285.

tween the *parodos* as a whole and the *syzygies* which it contains is the same as that which exists between the latter half of the comedy and its *episodic syzygies*. In both cases we seem to be dealing with an extension to a new use of a formal structure not originally indigenous to these parts of the play, whereas the *syzygy* looks like an essential and primordial feature of the *parabasis*.

The same may be said of the *agon*, the last of the formal peculiarities of fifth-century comedy which we have to examine.[6] Generally to be described as a highly conventional debate, the *agon* is functionally not nearly so undramatic and formally not quite so strict as the *parabasis*, but it is structurally even more elaborate. For obvious reasons it is usually found in the first half of the typical fifth-century comedy. The establishment of the new and incongruous situation inevitably encounters determined opposition from some defender of the old order, and the resultant conflict usually begins with deeds and ends with words. As soon as both of the combatants have agreed to settle their differences in orderly debate, the *agon* is opened with the singing of the *ode* by the Chorus. This usually contains some comment on the issues involved in the debate; occasionally we find it interrupted by spoken lines from one or both of the combatants. After the *ode* the Leader of the Chorus instructs one of the opposing parties to present his case; this command always fills exactly two lines and is called the *katakeleusmos*. The designated party, who always turns out to be the loser of the debate, then expounds his views in the *epirrheme*, which is never a single speech, but is interrupted, frequently or infrequently, by the defender of the other side. The pleader normally grows more and more fervid and excited, finally winding up with a *pnigos*. The four parts are then repeated. The Chorus sings the *antode*, and in the two-line *antikatakeleusmos* the Leader bids the other combatant state his views. This is done in the *antepirrheme* and *antipnigos*. The *agon* is sometimes concluded with the *sphragis*, a few lines spoken by the Leader of the Chorus announcing the winner of the debate, but this exceedingly archaic feature is more often absent than present in the comedies that have come down to us.

Like the *parabasis*, the *agon* is evidently nothing but a highly specialized *epirrhematic syzygy*, formally distinguished by the preservation of both the *pnigos* and by the presence of the conventional two-line *katakeleusmoi*, which are found nowhere else. It differs from the *parabasis* mainly in the fact that its contents are an organic part of the play, and a certain amount of adaptation to dramatic requirements is accordingly necessary. This is reflected in the composition of the *epirrhemes*,

[6] The extant *agons* are: *Kn.* 756–941, *Clouds* 950–1104, *Wasps* 526–724, *Birds* 451–628, *Lys.* 476–613, *Frogs* 895–1098, *Eccl.* 571–709 (defective), *Plutus* 487–626 (defective).

which seldom contain exactly the same number of lines and are always delivered by more than one speaker. Occasionally we find a comic plot so arranged as to contain two conflicts, one of which is of course less important than the other. Such subordinate conflicts may lead to subordinate debates, and these are composed in the form of *epirrhematic syzygies* closely resembling the type proper to the principal debate; such *syzygies* may be called *hypagons*.[7] They differ from the regular *agons* chiefly in being much shorter and in lacking the *sphragis;* all the other parts of the *agon,* however, including the characteristic *katakelcusmoi,* are found in the *hypagon* also.

With this we conclude our examination of the formal peculiarities of fifth-century comedy. Out of a long line of special forms and a regrettable multitude of technical terms emerges the *epirrhematic syzygy,* the distinguishing characteristic of the comic type of dramatic composition, a theme that admits of many variations without ever losing its integrity. The adaptability of this form is such that we are able to construct a comedy almost entirely out of the materials which its different uses provide; a brief outline of such a drama will be at once the example and the demonstration of this proposition. In the *prologue* the revolutionary designs of the hero are explained, and he is about to materialize them when the Chorus enters and opposition develops. The feelings and the aims of this group are expressed in a short *syzygy* at the beginning of the *parodos;* a second *syzygy* contains their murderous threats against the hero, his pleas that they listen to reason, and the final acquiescence of the Chorus or the character who represents their cause. In the *agon* the opposed opinions are rationally tested and the revolutionary one is found to be the better; the opposition is won over and the new order becomes a *fait accompli.* The Chorus now delivers the *parabasis.* This is followed by two *episodic syzygies* in which four results of the revolution are presented. A fifth short scene adds yet another, which may have to be resolved in a *hypagon* or may be followed by a *hypoparabasis.* The *exodos* concludes the play amidst general rejoicing.

No such play has come down to us, but we may be certain that the middle years of the fifth century witnessed the production of numerous comedies of this type. But tragedy was a more mature and, for this reason if for no other, a more highly esteemed form of art; its influence, for better or worse, was therefore very strong and must at a very early date have begun to effect that pseudomorphosis which is the dominant feature of the history of comedy. This process had been going on for many years before 425 B.C., when Aristophanes produced *The Achar-*

[7] The *hypagons* are: *Kn.* 303–460, *Clouds* 1345–1451.

nians, the earliest comedy which we possess, and the story of tragic influence is writ large on all of this poet's compositions. But this is more relevant to the whole history of comedy than to its origins; for the latter only the purely comic peculiarities have any possible value. Our examination of these has carried us back at least to the year 450 and perhaps to a period even earlier than that, to a time when the more fully developed tragic form of dramatic art had not yet initiated the lengthy process of transforming comedy into something quite foreign to its original spirit and purpose. The strictly formal evidence which we have at our disposal enables us to penetrate one step further into the past. If we examine the typical comedy sketched above and seek to distinguish between aboriginal elements and later additions our eye lights first on the *prologue.* The earliest tragedies that we possess begin with the *parodos,* and we can hardly be unjustified in assuming that at one time comedy began in the same way. The adoption of the *prologue* will thus be the earliest example of tragic influence.

This is as far as we could go if we had only the formal peculiarities of comedy to guide us, but there are certain features of the contents of the extant plays that provide us with valuable supplementary evidence. We have already observed that the latter half of a fifth-century comedy is usually taken up with the results of the comic revolution effected in the first half. But the latter portion of the play usually contains two other motifs that look like survivals of ritual and hence bear the stamp of great antiquity. These are the *komos,* or communal feast, and the *gamos,* or ceremonial union of the sexes. Some of the comedies are so constructed that these conventional actions take place as natural outgrowths of the antecedent portions of the plot, but in others they are less well integrated, and we often find female characters introduced into the closing scenes merely for the purpose of making the *gamos* possible. The *komos* too is frequently disconnected from the scenes which precede it and is introduced without warning. The careless treatment of these motifs suggests that they had come to be felt as essentially foreign bodies, dramaturgically awkward, but retained in obedience to the dictates of prescriptive custom. We shall not be far wrong if we assume that at some point early in the history of comedy that portion of the performance which followed the *parabasis* consisted of nothing but the *komos* and the *gamos.* As this archaic form of comedy developed and grew longer and more complicated, the latter half admitted other motifs. The element of conflict present in the *agon* extended itself, and the earliest increations took the form of the expulsion of unwelcome guests from the feast. But the dramatic and humorous potentialities of such scenes were so great that the primordial *komos* and *gamos* came

to be relegated to a subordinate position and finally were altogether dispossessed.

We have now traced the history of comedy back to a period in which the plays consisted of *parodos, agon, parabasis,* and *komos-gamos.* This reconstruction is in the highest degree tentative and conjectural, but it is at least based on real evidence, which, though entirely internal and largely ambiguous, is nevertheless derived from genuine and extant documents. Any attempt, however, to penetrate still further into the past would be entirely jejune, for the obvious reason that it would have to draw its conclusions from materials which are themselves hypothetical reconstructions. The percentage of error thus becomes forbiddingly large, and the pleasures of free speculation under conditions so uncertain must not be allowed to blind us to the fact it is inevitably and distressingly ineffectual. We can, with a species of probability, carry the history of comedy back to a point at which derivation from some elaborate ritual sequence appears indubitable, but the fact that we possess no other evidence for the existence of such a rite means that an attempt to bridge the gap between the reconstructed form of early fifth-century comedy and its putative ritual ancestor will be a contribution to the study of religion rather than to the history of the drama.

So much for the origins of Greek comedy and its development down to 425 B.C. The chief general characteristic of its later history has already been indicated and our task in what follows is mainly to illustrate the victorious progress of tragic influence. But it must be confessed in advance that we are very inadequately equipped to trace this development; our documents are neither numerous nor well distributed chronologically. The literary historian customarily distinguishes three periods in the history of Greek comedy: the Old, which ended with the fifth century, the Middle, which lasted until about 340 B.C., and the New, whose best work was produced around 300, although plays of this type continued to be composed even down into the Christian era. Of all the thousands of comedies which were written in ancient Greece we possess just fourteen. Nine of these belong to the last quarter of the fifth century, two of them to the early years of the fourth; we do not know the dates of the remaining three, but they can hardly be earlier than 315 or later than 290. None of this triad is preserved entire, but we have enough to form a reasonably good notion of what their total qualities must have been. The materials are thus relatively abundant for the latest phase of the Old Comedy and for the best period of the New, where the close imitations of the Roman Terence supplement the extant work of Menander, but the Middle Comedy is very inadequately represented by a pair of plays from the earliest years of its long history. The most serious disadvantage, however, lies in the fact that our documents

are the work of but two poets and thus give us at best a very narrow view even of those periods which they most generously illustrate. Short fragments from a comedy, however numerous, give us no idea of the play as a whole, and in spite of a host of citations we are quite unable to evaluate the work of the contemporaries of Aristophanes and of Menander. For the Middle Comedy our situation is patently worse; we possess not a single play of Alexis or of Antiphanes, the most eminent and the most typical dramatists of that period. The history of Greek comedy can therefore not be written on the basis of the materials which we possess; all that we can do is to outline briefly some of the least obscure and most general facts of a long and apparently involved development.

We have already stated that the influence of tragedy is everywhere evident in the earliest comedies that have come down to us. This is remarkable chiefly on the formal side, and large portions of the plays are not epirrhematically composed, but rather exhibit the form of *episodes* separated by *stasima,* just as in tragedy.[8] The latest complete *parabasis* that we have is found in *The Birds,* which was produced in 414 B.C.[9] The *agon* is missing in *The Acharnians, Peace,* and *The Thesmophoriazusae.* On the side of contents we find an increasing preoccupation with subjects that are utopian or timeless, and the traditional satire on contemporary events and personages recedes more and more into the background. In the early fourth century we observe what appears to be a sudden decline in the importance of the Chorus. This may have been first brought about by the straitened economic circumstances in which Athens found herself after the Peloponnesian War, but it was destined to be permanent, and in the New Comedy the Chorus is merely an adventitious band of revellers which entertains the audience between the acts into which the plays of this period are divided. In *The Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* of Aristophanes there are several interludes of much the same character. As soon as the Chorus had been relegated to a subordinate position the formal victory of tragedy was practically complete, for the *epirrhematic syzygy* was no longer possible. Hence the *parabasis* disappeared and the *agon* became merely a dialogue debate between two of the actors. Certain of the characteristic motifs of the Old Comedy had a higher survival value, and traces of the *komos* and the *gamos* are frequently to be observed in the Middle Comedy and sometimes even

[8] The *stasima* in comedy are: *Ach.* 836–859, 971–999, 1143–1173; *Kn.* 973–996; *Clouds* 1303–1320; *Wasps* 1450–1473; *Birds* 1470–1493; *Thesm.* 947–1000, 1136–1159; *Frogs* 814–829, 875–884, 1099–1118, 1251–1260, 1370–1377, 1482–1499.

[9] The *parabasis* of *The Clouds* lacks the *pnigos,* that of *Peace* the *epirrhemes,* that of *The Thesmophoriazusae* the *ode, antode,* and *antepirrheme,* that of *The Frogs* all the *kapla.*

in the New. The loss of the *parabasis* meant that the play was no longer divided into two well-defined parts, and in the fourth century the comic revolution ceased to be a characteristic feature of the plot. Comedy grew increasingly less fantastic and more realistic, and it finally came to deal solely with individual human problems. The plots became more complicated and were constructed with more skill; motivations had to be psychologically sound and improbabilities were assiduously avoided. With all this went a change in character. The animal spirits and boisterous licence of the Old Comedy gradually vanished and a more rarefied atmosphere supervened. Uproarious laughter turned into a quiet smile, and the effort of the New Comedy is not so much to amuse as to entertain. But the contrast between the Old and the New Comedy is one between Aristophanes and Menander, and we therefore pass over to a consideration of the work of these two dramatists. The remarks to be made about them will be of the most general character; more specific discussions will be found in the introductions prefixed to each of their plays.

As is so often the case with ancient writers, we know next to nothing about the life of Aristophanes. Son of Philippus and Zenodora, he was born about 445 B.C. in the Cydathenaean deme in Attica. Typical of such information as we do possess about the poet are the facts that his family owned land in Aegina, and that he was bald at an early age. He aroused the ire but successfully weathered the attacks of the demagogue Cleon. He began to write when he was very young, and his first play, *The Banqueters,* was produced in 427 B.C., when he was but eighteen. He composed about forty comedies in all, but we do not know how often he was victorious. On several occasions he brought out his plays under other names, but we do not know why he did this. The date of his death is uncertain, but it must have been later than 387. The ancient critics, who could compare his merits with those of his contemporaries, unanimously regarded him as the greatest of the poets of the Old Comedy. The result of this is that only Aristophanes has come down to us, and we have to base our judgments of the Old Comedy solely on the work of its most eminent artist. We must remember that we may not be dealing with what is typical of the comic drama of the time, but rather with something exceptional and revolutionary, advanced beyond its time.

Representative or not, for us it is unique. There has never been anything quite like it since, and regrettably there will never be anything quite like it again. The effect of the initial impact of these plays is one of bewilderment. One rubs one's eyes and wonders whether it really can have happened. A closer acquaintance and a bit of sober reflection

disclose a number of distinct reasons for astonishment. The first of these is the absolute freedom of speech which the comic poet of the fifth century enjoyed. He might make fun, banteringly or bitterly, thoroughly and repeatedly, of anything; no person, no institution, no god, enjoyed the slightest vestige of immunity, and the Athenian populace seems to have enjoyed these libels and slanders so hugely that they did not even require that they be always amusing.

Equally astonishing is the pervading obscenity of the Old Comedy. This is so abundant and so varied that it cannot be ignored or excised. It is so closely interwoven into almost every part of these plays that to expurgate is to destroy. A bowdlerized Aristophanes may offer a selection of passages well adapted to teach Attic Greek to schoolboys, but it is not Aristophanes. It may even illustrate certain aspects of Attic life and it will contain some incomplete passages of fine lyric poetry, but what has been taken away is the very part of his work which the poet clearly took the greatest delight in composing. On the other hand the misguided hypocrite who salves his conscience and saves his face by misrepresenting Aristophanes' bawdiness as something too healthy to be prurient does the poet a disservice more subtle and more harmful than the honest and busy expurgator. There is no escaping the fact that Aristophanes wrote just as obscenely as he could on every possible occasion. If we would appreciate him properly we should bear this in mind and endeavour to cultivate the same attitude that he had; the most unhealthy approach is the denial of the obvious in the name of healthiness.

Another feature of these comedies that immediately strikes us is the lordly ease with which their author has evidently composed them. This is inseparably connected with another equally remarkable feature of them, their dramaturgical ineptitude. Almost all of them are very badly constructed. They have nothing approaching unity; their plots are never worked out in any satisfactory fashion, and they abound in the most incredible inconsistencies. Yet they are obviously written by a man of magnificent gifts whom we cannot reasonably suppose to have been incapable of removing such blemishes; indeed, his latest comedies show indubitably that he could turn out as well integrated a play as anyone could desire. In his earlier work, on the other hand, it is clear that he just did not care about such things, and this observation gives us the clue to the proper appreciation of his work.

The distinguishing characteristic of Aristophanes is his brilliant insouciance. Endowed by nature with an intellect of an exceptionally high order and an imagination inexhaustibly fertile, he exercised his talents in a medium ideally suited to them. His best comedies are nothing but concatenations of splendid and dazzling conceits which follow one

another in breathless abundance. He is never at a loss what to invent next; indeed, he hardly ever has time fully to exploit the humorous possibilities of one motif before he is occupied with another. A mind of this sort has no use for consistency, and that stodgy virtue may best be cultivated by the lesser talents, who need all the virtues they can get. An Aristophanes should not degrade himself by pretending to be an ordinary mortal.

It is from this point of view that we must approach him if we would avoid misunderstanding him. His brilliant insouciance makes him a lovable rogue, and we must not forget that Plato adored him. He has naturally been misunderstood, grossly and variously. He has a lot to say about himself, but hardly a word of it can be taken seriously. This would be an easy deduction from the quality of his mind, but he repeatedly proves it by his actions, for he blandly denies doing what he plainly and frequently does. His views on political and social questions have been eagerly and ponderously analysed, but this is mostly a waste of time and energy. He hated Cleon, so much is clear, but when he came to put his hate into a comedy it stifled his wit, and the result was *The Knights,* one of his poorest plays. It is safe to say that whenever his wit is functioning properly we have no hope of discovering what his real feelings were.

He has often been called unfair, but this righteous and foolish accusation results from an inadequate appreciation of the quality of his intellect. Fairness is nothing but a kind of static consistency, and Aristophanes had no taste for consistency of any sort. He treats everyone precisely as his fancy dictates, and it is absurd to expect him to do otherwise. The unique quality of his wit lies in the very fact that it is not fettered by any ethical standards. It is entirely pure, and we should be grateful that it is. We have the right to censure him only when his wit fails as wit, whether because his eminently ethical hatred of some demagogue has choked it, or because he himself has aimed ineptly, as he sometimes did.

Brilliance, however, was not his only gift, and his heart was as sensitive as his mind was keen. The soft side of his personality expresses itself in his lyrics, and here he astounds and delights us, at one moment with idyllic songs of the countryside, at another with lines of infinite tenderness and sympathy, particularly towards old men. Often in the midst of a lyric passage of great warmth and beauty something will touch off his wit, and a sentence that has begun in a gentle and sympathetic spirit will end with a devastating personal jibe or an uproarious bit of obscenity. The two sides of the poet's nature are not really separable; he can be both witty and lyrical, almost at one and the same moment. This strange and perfect blend of characteristics apparently so incompatible

makes Aristophanes a wonderful man to read, and we begin to understand why Plato loved the old rogue as he did; he must have been a wonderful man to know.

What we know about the life of Menander is briefly told. He was born at Athens in 342 B.C., the son of Diopithes and Hegesistrata, and nephew of Alexis, the poet of the Middle Comedy. He naturally received instruction in dramatic writing from his famous uncle, and he is also reported to have studied under the Peripatetic philosopher and scientist Theophrastus, the successor of Aristotle in the Lyceum. A far greater philosopher, Epicurus, was a friend of Menander's boyhood. The dramatist apparently was good-looking, wealthy, and of a good family, and we are informed that he was exceptionally fond of women. He wrote more than one hundred plays, but was victorious only eight times. He is reported to have met his death by drowning, in the year 292. After his death his fame was enormous, and only Homer in Greek literature and Virgil in Roman could claim greater renown. In spite of this, however, the modern world was not bequeathed any of his plays, and had to wait until the latter part of the nineteenth century to form any adequate estimate of his genius. Almost all that we have of his work has been recovered from papyri found in the rubbish-heaps of Oxyrhynchus, a town in Roman Egypt.

If we have just familiarized ourselves with the earlier comedies of Aristophanes and then read those of Menander we find it almost impossible to believe that the New Comedy is the lineal descendant of the Old and that but a single century separates the two. In form and in spirit, in style and in contents, the difference between them is so enormous that we are apt to forget that they must not be evaluated comparatively. There is nothing Aristophanic about Menander, and if we expect to find any such thing we are bitterly disappointed. It is easy to judge Menander unfairly and to fail to realize that in his own way he is very nearly as great as his incredible predecessor. We must not look for brilliant insouciance; what we find is almost the opposite, for the essential feature of Menander's genius is careful dexterity. His comedies are constructed with consummate skill, and in spite of the great complication of their plots they never lack clarity and unity. No detail is too mean to receive devoted attention, and the results are comedies in which there seems never to be a word too few or too many. The motivations are always sound and reasonable, and the characterizations are just detailed enough to be convincing. Yet this flawless performance is executed with such ease and such deftness that we at first tend to undervalue the dramatist's

achievement because we are unaware of the labour that it must have cost him.

Such dramaturgical perfection requires a style that is equally perfect and apparently just as effortless. This Menander had, and his command of language was such that the later centuries of the ancient world made collections of epigrammatical maxims from his plays. Many of these have come down to us, and it is interesting to note that frequently they are quite without value for what they say, but over and over again we meet "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." In the plays that we have, such apophthegms are far from numerous, and there is no reason to believe that Menander ever went out of his way to write very many of them, but whenever they were dramatically appropriate his marvellous style phrased them for all time. It is a style eminently flexible and adaptable, always exactly adequate to whatever demands may be made on it. Normally it is plain and simple, in keeping with the ideal of the persons about whom and for whom Menander wrote, but it can be pathetic and emotional or sparkling and clever, as the dramatic occasion may require.

Whatever its mood, Menander's style is always clear, and his passion for clarity may be the principal reason why his plays are never poetic, even though they are always composed in verse. It is a verse that scans and no more; otherwise it might just as well be prose. Yet we can but seldom observe any traces of the restraints which even so free a verse as the comic trimeter must have imposed. The order of the words is the normal one of prose, and the dramatist never uses any forms or phrases that were foreign to the speech of cultured Athenians in the late fourth century.

With respect to the contents of their plays the dramatists of the New Comedy operated in a narrow field. Their plots exhibit an astonishing repetition of stereotyped motifs, and one is tempted to wonder why the Athenian audiences did not grow weary of young men in love with putative slave-girls who turn out to be foundlings of citizen extraction, and hence may marry the young men after all, in spite of the opposition of parents and the intrigues of slaves. But such things are merely the frame within which the refined and fertile inventive genius of the playwright exercised itself. In this department of the dramatic art Menander seems to have been supreme.

Such are some of the perfections of Menander's genius. If they constituted his sole merits he might command our boundless admiration, but he could not excite our love. In trying to explain why he is able to do this also we have first to get rid of a difficult prejudice. The choice of the term comedy to designate Menander's plays is unfortunate in the extreme, for there is nothing really funny about them. The plots most

closely resemble those of Euripidean tragedies such as *Alcestis* and *Helen*. The characters find themselves in a complicated and unpleasant situation which for a while seems destined to grow steadily worse, but the story is so manipulated that everything works out well in the end and everyone is left happy and contented. We know that this is going to be the ultimate result, yet we do not laugh at the temporary misfortunes of the characters; they elicit too much of our sympathy for that.

There is furthermore nothing "comic" about the language which is put into the mouths of the characters. An occasional amusing remark cannot impugn the validity of the statement that the dialogue of the Menandrian comedy is not funny and is not meant to be. Little or no real obscenity is found in these plays, and anything resembling the extravagant and fanciful wit of Aristophanes is quite unknown. Contemporary persons are never lampooned, and contemporary events, such as acts of war, figure only as remote causes of misfortunes. What we smile at in reading Menander is a varied panorama of human weakness and charm, exposed in the reactions of his characters to the situations in which they find themselves and above all in their dealings with one another. We smile at this gently and happily, because Menander is always kind, always sympathetic, and always tolerant. His material is much the same as that of the satirist, but his approach is different and our response differs accordingly. To be successful in such a medium as the New Comedy the artist must not only know the human heart thoroughly, but also love it devotedly. No one in the ancient world seems to have possessed these qualifications as abundantly as Menander.

E. O'N., Jr.

THE PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS

Characters in the Play

Danaus
The King of Argos
Herald of Aegyptus
Chorus of the Daughters of Danaus
Attendants

INTRODUCTION

AN ANCIENT legend which records at its beginning the wanderings and sufferings of Io provided Aeschylus with the material out of which he constructed *The Suppliants*. In remote prehistoric times, so the legend ran, Zeus fell in love with Io, priestess of Hera, a daughter of Inachus, the king of Argos. Io, though endeavouring to avoid the advances of Zeus, was punished through Hera's jealousy. She was transformed partly into a heifer and made to wander in a half-crazed state over the world until at last she came to the land of Egypt. There, through a mysterious and essentially mystical union with Zeus, the touch of his hand, her transformation was ended, and she conceived a child, Epaphus. Epaphus became the father of Libya, who in turn bore two sons, Belus and Agenor. From Belus sprang two sons, Aegyptus and Danaus. Now Aegyptus had fifty sons and Danaus fifty daughters. Serious conflict arose between the two brothers, for the daughters of Danaus rejected the proposals of marriage proffered by the sons of Aegyptus. In stark terror of the violent lust of their cousins, the maidens with their father fled for asylum to Argos, to the home of their cherished ancestress, Io, there to seek the protection of the gods and of Pelasgus, the king.

Here the action of *The Suppliants* begins. The maidens gain the protection of the king who refuses to turn them over to the sons of Aegyptus, who have followed them in haste to Argos. The emissary of the suitors withdraws from the scene after having made it clear that war is impending, for the sons of Aegyptus have determined to take the maidens by force. The play ends at this point and clearly looks forward to subsequent events in the action. It seems evident, therefore, that *The Suppliants* is the first play of a tragic trilogy, the second and third plays of which are now lost, but whose titles were probably *The Egyptians* and *The Daughters of Danaus*. So far as we can reconstruct Aeschylus' treatment of the remainder of the story, we know that the sons of Aegyptus gained possession of the maidens, and compelled them to marry. Danaus yielded his consent, though secretly commanding his daughters to kill their husbands on their wedding night. All obeyed save one, Hypermnestra, whom the Roman poet, Horace, in the eleventh ode of his third book, described

with his brilliant phrase, *splendide mendax*. She alone spared her husband, Lynceus, because she loved him. At the end of the trilogy she was brought to trial but was successfully defended by Aphrodite, on the ground that love is a power which must be sanctioned because of its omnipresence in the universe.

The Suppliants seems to be an early work of the poet, and it is usually considered the first extant drama in Western European literature. The generally accepted date for its composition is approximately 492 B.C. Its dramatic structure is relatively simple since a large portion of the play is devoted to lyrics sung by the Chorus. Such action as there is seems to be reduced to an absolute minimum, for only on occasion does it demand even a second actor. The fact that the Chorus serves collectively as the protagonist contributes to the structural simplicity of the play.

Many general meanings have been found in *The Suppliants* by various critics. These range from mystical religious interpretations to theories which insist that the play contains a magnificent defence of romantic love, that the Danaids resist and ultimately slay their suitors on the ground that a loveless union between man and woman is unholy. The mystical interpretation derives from the effort to attach special and symbolic significance to the relation between Io and Zeus, and to see further symbolism in the antagonism between the sons of Aegyptus and the Danaids. However valid these theories may be, Aeschylus advances at least two ideas with great clarity. First, there is the notion that the gods are friends and protectors of suppliants, people who are sorely pressed by the vicissitudes of life. This is indeed the theme sounded in the opening lines of the play, where the Chorus prays,

> Zeus! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!
> Look down on us who crave
> Thine aid—

Secondly, underlying the whole play is an enlightened, and in a sense, an unanthropomorphic conception of Zeus, a conception of a godhead which foreshadows the mature and fully wrought theology of the *Oresteia*. In *The Suppliants* the notion is unformed and scarcely explicit, but it seems to be most notably apparent in the choral ode on page 26 which begins,

> O King of Kings, among the blest
> Thou highest and thou happiest.

There can be no doubt that at the outset of his poetic activity Aeschylus had before him questions concerning fundamental theological issues.

THE SUPPLIANTS

(SCENE:—*A sacred precinct near the shore in Argos. Several statues of the gods can be seen, as well as a large altar. As the play opens,* DANAUS, *and his fifty daughters, the maidens who compose the* CHORUS, *enter. Their costumes have an oriental richness about them not characteristic of the strictly Greek. They carry also the wands of suppliants. The* CHORUS *is singing.*)

CHORUS

ZEUS! Lord and guard of suppliant hands!
Look down benign on us who crave
Thine aid—whom winds and waters drave
From where, through drifting shifting sands,
Pours Nilus to the wave.
From where the green land, god-possest,
Closes and fronts the Syrian waste,
We flee as exiles, yet unbanned
By murder's sentence from our land;
But—since Aegyptus had decreed
His sons should wed his brother's seed,—
Ourselves we tore from bonds abhorred,
From wedlock not of heart but hand,
Nor brooked to call a kinsman lord!

And Danaus, our sire and guide,
The king of counsel, pond'ring well
The dice of fortune as they fell,
Out of two griefs the kindlier chose,
And bade us fly, with him beside,
Heedless what winds or waves arose,
And o'er the wide sea waters haste,
Until to Argos' shore at last
Our wandering pinnace came—

Argos, the immemorial home
Of her from whom we boast to come—
Io, the ox-horned maiden, whom,
After long wandering, woe, and scathe,
Zeus with a touch, a mystic breath,
Made mother of our name.
Therefore, of all the lands of earth,
On this most gladly step we forth,
And in our hands aloft we bear—
Sole weapon for a suppliant's wear—
The olive-shoot, with wool enwound!
City, and land, and waters wan
Of Inachus, and gods most high,
And ye who, deep beneath the ground,
Bring vengeance weird on mortal man,
Powers of the grave, on you we cry!
And unto Zeus the Saviour, guard
Of mortals' holy purity!
Receive ye us—keep watch and ward
Above the suppliant maiden band!
Chaste be the heart of this your land
Towards the weak! but, ere the throng,
The wanton swarm, from Egypt sprung,
Leap forth upon the silted shore,
Thrust back their swift-rowed bark again,
Repel them, urge them to the main!
And there, 'mid storm and lightning's shine,
And scudding drift and thunder's roar,
Deep death be theirs, in stormy brine!
Before they foully grasp and win
Us, maiden-children of their kin,
And climb the couch by law denied,
And wrong each weak reluctant bride.

strophe 1

And now on her I call,
Mine ancestress, who far on Egypt's shore
A young cow's semblance wore,—
A maiden once, by Hera's malice changed!
And then on him withal,
Who, as amid the flowers the grazing creature ranged,
Was in her by a breath of Zeus conceived;
And, as the hour of birth drew nigh,

By fate fulfilled, unto the light he came;—
And Epaphus for name,
Born from the touch of Zeus, the child received

antistrophe 1

On him, on him I cry,
And him for patron hold—
While in this grassy vale I stand,
Where Io roamed of old!
And here, recounting all her toil and pain,
Signs will I show to those who rule the land
That I am child of hers; and all shall understand,
Hearing the doubtful tale of the dim past made plain.

strophe 2

And, ere the end shall be,
Each man the truth of what I tell shall see.
And if there dwell hard by
One skilled to read from bird-notes augury,
That man, when through his ears shall thrill our tearful wail,
Shall deem he hears the voice, the plaintive tale
Of her, the piteous spouse of Tereus, lord of guile—
Whom the hawk harries yet, the mourning nightingale.

antistrophe 2

She, from her happy home and fair streams scared away,
Wails wild and sad for haunts beloved erewhile.
Yea, and for Itylus—ah, well-a-day!
Slain by her own, his mother's hand,
Maddened by lustful wrong, the deed by Tereus planned!

strophe 3

Like her I wail and wail, in soft Ionian tones,
And as she wastes, even so
Wastes my soft cheek, once ripe with Nilus' suns,
And all my heart dissolves in utter woe.
Sad flowers of grief I cull,
Fleeing from kinsmen's love unmerciful—
Yea, from the clutching hands, the wanton crowd,
I sped across the waves, from Egypt's land of cloud.

antistrophe 3

Gods of the ancient cradle of my race,
Hear me, just gods! With righteous grace
On me, on me look down!

Grant not to youth its heart's unchaste desire,
But, swiftly spurning lust's unholy fire,
Bless only love and willing wedlock's crown!
The war-worn fliers from the battle's wrack
Find refuge at the hallowed altar-side,
The sanctuary divine,—
Ye gods! such refuge unto me provide—
Such sanctuary be mine!

strophe 4

Though the deep will of Zeus be hard to track,
Yet doth it flame and glance,
A beacon in the dark, 'mid clouds of chance
That wrap mankind.

antistrophe 4

Yea, though the counsel fall, undone it shall not lie,
Whate'er be shaped and fixed within Zeus' ruling mind—
Dark as a solemn grove, with sombre leafage shaded,
His paths of purpose wind,
A marvel to man's eye.

strophe 5

Smitten by him, from towering hopes degraded,
Mortals lie low and still:
Tireless and effortless, works forth its will
The arm divine!
God from His holy seat, in calm of unarmed power,
Brings forth the deed, at its appointed hour!

antistrophe 5

Let Him look down on mortal wantonness!
Lo! how the youthful stock of Belus' line
Craves for me, uncontrolled—
With greed and madness bold—
Urged on by passion's shunless stress—
And, cheated, learns too late the prey has 'scaped their hold!

strophe 6

Ah, listen, listen to my grievous tale,
My sorrow's words, my shrill and tearful cries!
Ah woe, ah woe!
Loud with lament the accents rise,
And from my living lips my own sad dirges flow!

refrain 1

O Apian land of hill and dale,
Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail—
Have mercy, hear my prayer!
Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear
My woven raiment, and from off my hair
Cast the Sidonian veil!

antistrophe 6

Ah, but if fortune smile, if death be driven away,
Vowed rites, with eager haste, we to the gods will pay!
Alas, alas again!
O whither drift the waves? and who shall loose the pain?

refrain 1

O Apian land of hill and dale,
Thou kennest yet, O land, this faltered foreign wail!
Have mercy, hear my prayer!
Lo, how again, again, I rend and tear
My woven raiment, and from off my hair
Cast the Sidonian veil!

strophe 7

The wafting oar, the bark with woven sail,
From which the sea foamed back,
Sped me, unharmed of storms, along the breeze's track—
Be it unblamed of me!
But ah, the end, the end of my emprise!
May He, the Father, with all-seeing eyes,
Grant me that end to see!

refrain 2

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore
I may escape the forced embrace
Of those proud children of the race
That sacred Io bore.

antistrophe 7

And thou, O maiden-goddess chaste and pure—
Queen of the inner fane,—
Look of thy grace on me, O Artemis,
Thy willing suppliant—thine, thine it is,
Who from the lustful onslaught fled secure,
To grant that I too without stain
The shelter of thy purity may gain!

refrain 2

Grant that henceforth unstained as heretofore
I may escape the forced embrace
Of those proud children of the race
That sacred Io bore!

strophe 8

Yet if this may not be,
We, the dark race sun-smitten, we
Will speed with suppliant wands
To Zeus who rules below, with hospitable hands
Who welcomes all the dead from all the lands:
Yea, by our own hands strangled, we will go,
Spurned by Olympian gods, unto the gods below!

refrain 3

Zeus, hear and save!
The searching, poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave,
Was of a goddess: well I know
The bitter ire, the wrathful woe
Of Hera, queen of heaven—
A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

antistrophe 8

Bethink thee, what dispraise
Of Zeus himself mankind will raise,
If now he turn his face averted from our cries!
If now, dishonoured and alone,
The ox-horned maiden's race shall be undone,
Children of Epaphus, his own begotten son—
Zeus, listen from on high!—to thee our prayers arise.

refrain 3

Zeus, hear and save!
The searching poisonous hate, that Io vexed and drave,
Was of a goddess: well I know
The bitter ire, the wrathful woe
Of Hera, queen of heaven—
A storm, a storm her breath, whereby we yet are driven!

(*After the* CHORUS *has finished its song and dance,* DANAUS *comes forward.*)

DANAUS

Children, be wary—wary he with whom
Ye come, your trusty sire and steersman old:
And that same caution hold I here on land,
And bid you hoard my words, inscribing them
On memory's tablets. Lo, I see afar
Dust, voiceless herald of a host, arise;
And hark, within their griding sockets ring
Axles of hurrying wheels! I see approach,
Borne in curved cars, by speeding horses drawn,
A speared and shielded band. The chiefs, perchance,
Of this their land are hitherward intent
To look on us, of whom they yet have heard
By messengers alone. But come who may,
And come he peaceful or in ravening wrath
Spurred on his path, 'twere best, in any case,
Damsels, to cling unto this altar-mound
Made sacred to their gods of festival,—
A shrine is stronger than a tower to save,
A shield that none may cleave. Step swift thereto,
And in your left hands hold with reverence
The white-crowned wands of suppliance, the sign
Beloved of Zeus, compassion's lord, and speak
To those that question you, words meek and low
And piteous, as beseems your stranger state,
Clearly avowing of this flight of yours
The bloodless cause; and on your utterance
See to it well that modesty attend;
From downcast eyes, from brows of pure control,
Let chastity look forth; nor, when ye speak,
Be voluble nor eager—they that dwell
Within this land are sternly swift to chide.
And be your words submissive: heed this well;
For weak ye are, outcasts on stranger lands,
And froward talk beseems not strengthless hands.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O father, warily to us aware
Thy words are spoken, and thy wisdom's hest
My mind shall hoard, with Zeus our sire to aid.

DANAUS

Even so—with gracious aspect let him aid.

LEADER
Fain were I now to seat me by thy side.

DANAUS
Now dally not, but put our thought in act.

LEADER
Zeus, pity our distress, or e'er we die.

DANAUS
If so he will, your toils to joy will turn.

LEADER
Lo, on this shrine, the semblance of a bird.

DANAUS
Zeus' bird of dawn it is; invoke the sign.

LEADER
Thus I invoke the saving rays of morn.

DANAUS
Next, bright Apollo, exiled once from heaven.

LEADER
The exiled god will pity our exile.

DANAUS
Yea, may he pity, giving grace and aid.

LEADER
Whom next invoke I, of these other gods?

DANAUS
Lo, here a trident, symbol of a god.

LEADER
Who gave sea-safety; may he bless on land!

DANAUS
This next is Hermes, carved in Grecian wise.

LEADER
Then let him herald help to freedom won.

DANAUS
Lastly, adore this altar consecrate
To many lesser gods in one; then crouch

On holy ground, a flock of doves that flee,
Scared by no alien hawks, a kin not kind,
Hateful, and fain of love more hateful still.
Foul is the bird that rends another bird,
And foul the men who hale unwilling maids,
From sire unwilling, to the bridal bed.
Never on earth, nor in the lower world,
Shall lewdness such as theirs escape the ban:
There too, if men say right, a God there is
Who upon dead men turns their sin to doom,
To final doom. Take heed, draw hitherward,
That from this hap your safety ye may win.
(*The* KING OF ARGOS *enters, followed by his attendants and soldiers.*)

THE KING OF ARGOS

Speak—of what land are ye? No Grecian band
Is this to whom I speak, with Eastern robes
And wrappings richly dight: no Argive maid,
No woman in all Greece such garb doth wear.
This too gives marvel, how unto this land,
Unheralded, unfriended, without guide,
And without fear, ye came? yet wands I see,
True sign of suppliance, by you laid down
On shrines of these our gods of festival.
No land but Greece can rede such signs aright.
Much else there is, conjecture well might guess,
But let words teach the man who stands to hear.

LEADER

True is the word thou spakest of my garb;
But speak I unto thee as citizen,
Or Hermes' wandbearer, or chieftain king?

THE KING OF ARGOS

For that, take heart and answer without fear.
I am Pelasgus, ruler of this land,
Child of Palaichthon, whom the earth brought forth;
And, rightly named from me, the race who reap
This country's harvests are Pelasgian called.
And o'er the wide and westward-stretching land,
Through which the lucent wave of Strymon flows,
I rule; Perrhaebia's land my boundary is
Northward, and Pindus' further slopes, that watch

Paeonia, and Dodona's mountain ridge.
West, east, the limit of the washing seas
Restrains my rule—the interspace is mine.
But this whereon we stand is Apian land,
Styled so of old from the great healer's name;
For Apis, coming from Naupactus' shore
Beyond the strait, child of Apollo's self
And like him seer and healer, cleansed this land
From man-devouring monsters, whom the earth,
Stained with pollution of old bloodshedding,
Brought forth in malice, beasts of ravening jaws,
A grisly throng of serpents manifold.
And healings of their hurt, by knife and charm,
Apis devised, unblamed of Argive men,
And in their prayers found honour, for reward.
—Lo, thou hast heard the tokens that I give:
Speak now thy race, and tell a forthright tale;
In sooth, this people loves not many words.

LEADER

Short is my word and clear. Of Argive race
We come, from her, the ox-horned maiden who
Erst bare the sacred child. My word shall give
Whate'er can stablish this my soothfast tale.

THE KING OF ARGOS

O stranger maids, I may not trust this word,
That ye have share in this our Argive race.
No likeness of our country do ye bear,
But semblance as of Libyan womankind.
Even such a stock by Nilus' banks might grow;
Yea, and the Cyprian stamp, in female forms,
Shows, to the life, what males impressed the same.
And, furthermore, of roving Indian maids
Whose camping-grounds by Aethiopia lie,
And camels burdened even as mules, and bearing
Riders, as horses bear, mine ears have heard;
And tales of flesh-devouring mateless maids
Called Amazons: to these, if bows ye bare,
I most had deemed you like. Speak further yet,
That of your Argive birth the truth I learn.

LEADER

Here in this Argive land—so runs the tale—
Io was priestess once of Hera's fane.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Yea, truth it is, and far this word prevails:
Is't said that Zeus with mortal mingled love?

LEADER

Ay, and that Hera that embrace surmised.

THE KING OF ARGOS

How issued then this strife of those on high?

LEADER

By Hera's will, a heifer she became.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Held Zeus aloof then from the hornèd beast?

LEADER

'Tis said, he loved, in semblance of a bull.

THE KING OF ARGOS

And his stern consort, did she aught thereon?

LEADER

One myriad-eyed she set, the heifer's guard.

THE KING OF ARGOS

How namest thou this herdsman many-eyed?

LEADER

Argus, the child of Earth, whom Hermes slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Still did the goddess vex the beast ill-starred?

LEADER

She wrought a gadfly with a goading sting.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Thus drave she Io hence, to roam afar?

LEADER

Yea—this thy word coheres exact with mine.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Then to Canopus and to Memphis came she?

LEADER
And by Zeus' hand was touched, and bare a child.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Who vaunts him the Zeus-mated creature's son?

LEADER
Epaphus, named rightly from the saving touch.

THE KING OF ARGOS
And whom in turn did Epaphus beget?

LEADER
Libya, with name of a wide land endowed.

THE KING OF ARGOS
And who from her was born unto the race?

LEADER
Belus: from him two sons, my father one.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Speak now to me his name, this greybeard wise.

LEADER
Danaus; his brother fifty sons begat.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Grudge not, in telling, his name too to tell.

LEADER
Aegyptus: thou my lineage old hast heard—
Strive then to aid a kindred Argive band.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea of a truth, in backward scope of time,
Of Argive race ye seem: but say what chance
Fell on you, goading you from home and land?

LEADER
Lord of Pelasgian men, calamity
Is manifold and diverse; as of birds
Feather from feather differs, so of men
The woes are sundry. Who had dared foretell

That this our sudden flight, this hate and fear
Of loathly wedlock, would on Argos' shore
Set forth a race of kindred lineage?

THE KING OF ARGOS
What crave ye of these gods of festival,
Holding up newly-plucked white-tufted boughs?

LEADER
Ne'er to be slaves unto Aegyptus' race.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Doth your own hate, or doth the law forbid?

LEADER
Not as our lords, but as unloved, we chide them.

THE KING OF ARGOS
'Tis from such wedlock that advancement comes.

LEADER
How easy is it, from the weak to turn!

THE KING OF ARGOS
How then toward you can I be conscience-clear?

LEADER
Deny us, though Aegyptus' race demand.

THE KING OF ARGOS
A heavy task thou namest, a rash war.

LEADER
But Justice champions them who strike for her.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea, if their side was from the outset hers.

LEADER
Revere the gods thus crowned, who steer the State.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Awe thrills me, seeing these shrines with leafage crowned.

(*The whole* CHORUS *now sings its responses to the* KING.)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Yea, stern the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord.
Child of Palaichthon, royal chief
Of thy Pelasgians, hear!
Bow down thine heart to my relief—
A fugitive, a suppliant, swift with fear,
A creature whom the wild wolves chase
O'er toppling crags; in piteous case
Aloud, afar she lows,
Calling the herdsman's trusty arm to save her from her foes!

THE KING OF ARGOS

Lo, with bowed heads beside our city shrines
Ye sit 'neath shade of new-plucked olive-boughs.
Our distant kin's resentment Heaven forefend!
Let not this hap, unhoped and unforeseen,
Bring war on us: for strife we covet not.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Justice, the daughter of right-dealing Zeus,
Justice, the queen of suppliants, look down,
That this our plight no ill may loose
Upon your town!
This word, even from the young, let age and wisdom learn:
If thou to suppliants show grace,
Thou shalt not lack Heaven's grace in turn,
So long as virtue's gifts on heavenly shrines have place.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Not at my private hearth ye sit and sue;
And if the city bear a common stain,
Be it the common toil to cleanse the same:
Therefore no pledge, no promise will I give,
Ere counsel with the commonwealth be held.[1]

CHORUS

strophe 2

Nay, but the source of sway, the city's self, art thou,
A power unjudged! thine, only thine,
To rule the right of hearth and shrine!
Before thy throne and sceptre all men bow!
Thou, in all causes lord, beware the curse divine!

THE KING OF ARGOS

May that curse fall upon mine enemies!
I cannot aid you without risk of scathe,
Nor scorn your prayers—unmerciful it were.
Perplexed, distraught I stand, and fear alike
The twofold chance, to do or not to do.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Have heed of him who looketh from on high,
The guard of woeful mortals, whosoe'er
Unto their fellows cry,
And find no pity, find no justice there.
Abiding in his wrath, the suppliants' lord
Doth smite, unmoved by cries, unbent by prayerful word.

THE KING OF ARGOS

But if Aegyptus' children grasp you here,
Claiming, their country's right, to hold you theirs
As next of kin, who dares to counter this?
Plead ye your country's laws, if plead ye may,
That upon you they lay no lawful hand.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Let me not fall, O nevermore,
A prey into the young men's hand;
Rather than wed whom I abhor,
By pilot-stars I flee this land;
O king, take justice to thy side,
And with the righteous powers decide!

THE KING OF ARGOS

Hard is the cause—make me not judge thereof.
Already I have vowed it, to do nought
Save after counsel with my people ta'en,
King though I be; that ne'er in after time,
If ill fate chance, my people then may say—
In aid of strangers thou the State hast slain.

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Zeus, lord of kinship, rules at will
The swaying balance, and surveys
Evil and good; to men of ill

Gives evil, and to good men praise.
And thou—since true those scales do sway—
Shalt thou from justice shrink away?

THE KING OF ARGOS

A deep, a saving counsel here there needs—
An eye that like a diver to the depth
Of dark perplexity can pass and see,
Undizzied, unconfused. First must we care
That to the State and to ourselves this thing
Shall bring no ruin; next, that wrangling hands
Shall grasp you not as prey, nor we ourselves
Betray you thus embracing sacred shrines,
Nor make the avenging all-destroying god,
Who not in hell itself sets dead men free,
A grievous inmate, an abiding bane.
—Spake I not right, of saving counsel's need?

CHORUS

strophe 4

Yea, counsel take and stand to aid
At Justice' side and mine.
Betray not me, the timorous maid
Whom far beyond the brine
A godless violence cast forth forlorn.

antistrophe 4

O King, wilt thou behold—
Lord of this land, wilt thou behold me torn
From altars manifold?
Bethink thee of the young men's wrath and lust,
Hold off their evil pride;

strophe 5

Steel not thyself to see the suppliant thrust
From hallowed statues' side,
Haled by the frontlet on my forehead bound,
As steeds are led, and drawn
By hands that drag from shrine and altar-mound
My vesture's fringèd lawn.

antistrophe 5

Know thou that whether for Aegyptus' race
Thou dost their wish fulfil,
Or for the gods and for each holy place—

Be thy choice good or ill,
Blow is with blow requited, grace with grace.
Such is Zeus' righteous will.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Yea, I have pondered: from the sea of doubt
Here drives at length the bark of thought ashore;
Landward with screw and windlass haled, and firm,
Clamped to her props, she lies. The need is stern;
With men or gods a mighty strife we strive
Perforce, and either hap in grief concludes.
For, if a house be sacked, new wealth for old
Not hard it is to win—if Zeus the lord
Of treasure favour—more than quits the loss,
Enough to pile the store of wealth full high;
Or if a tongue shoot forth untimely speech,
Bitter and strong to goad a man to wrath,
Soft words there be to soothe that wrath away:
But what device shall make the war of kin
Bloodless? that woe, the blood of many beasts,
And victims manifold to many gods,
Alone can cure. Right glad I were to shun
This strife, and am more fain of ignorance
Than of the wisdom of a woe endured.
The gods send better than my soul foretells!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Of many cries for mercy, hear the end.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Say on, then, for it shall not 'scape mine ear.

LEADER

Girdles we have, and bands that bind our robes.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Even so; such things beseem a woman's wear.

LEADER

Know, then, with these a fair device there is—

THE KING OF ARGOS

Speak, then: what utterance doth this foretell?

LEADER

Unless to us thou givest pledge secure—

THE KING OF ARGOS
What can thy girdles' craft achieve for thee?

LEADER
Strange votive tablets shall these statues deck.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Mysterious thy resolve—avow it clear.

LEADER
Swiftly to hang me on these sculptured gods!

THE KING OF ARGOS
Thy word is as a lash to urge my heart.

LEADER
Thou seest truth, for I have cleared thine eyes.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea, and woes manifold, invincible,
A crowd of ills, sweep on me torrent-like.
My bark goes forth upon a sea of troubles
Unfathomed, ill to traverse, harbourless.
For if my deed shall match not your demand,
Dire, beyond shot of speech, shall be the bane
Your death's pollution leaves unto this land.
Yet if against your kin, Aegyptus' race,
Before our gates I front the doom of war,
Will not the city's loss be sore? Shall men
For women's sake incarnadine the ground?
But yet the wrath of Zeus, the suppliants' lord,
I needs must fear: most awful unto man
The terror of his anger. Thou, old man,
The father of these maidens, gather up
Within your arms these wands of suppliance,
And lay them at the altars manifold
Of all our country's gods, that all the town
Know, by this sign, that ye come here to sue.
Nor, in thy haste, do thou say aught of me.
Swift is this folk to censure those who rule;
But, if they see these signs of suppliance,
It well may chance that each will pity you,
And loathe the young men's violent pursuit;
And thus a fairer favour you may find:
For, to the helpless, each man's heart is kind.

DANAUS

To us, beyond gifts manifold it is
To find a champion thus compassionate;
Yet send with me attendants, of thy folk,
Rightly to guide me, that I duly find
Each altar of your city's gods that stands
Before the fane, each dedicated shrine;
And that in safety through the city's ways
I may pass onwards: all unlike to yours
The outward semblance that I wear—the race
That Nilus rears is all dissimilar
To that of Inachus. Keep watch and ward
Lest heedlessness bring death: full oft, I ween,
Friend hath slain friend, not knowing whom he slew.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Go at his side, attendants,—he saith well.
On to the city's consecrated shrines!
Nor be of many words to those ye meet,
The while this suppliant voyager ye lead.

(DANAUS *departs with attendants.*)

LEADER

Let him go forward, thy command obeying.
But me how biddest, how assurest thou?

THE KING OF ARGOS

Leave there the new-plucked boughs, thy sorrow's sign.

LEADER

Thus beckoned forth, at thy behest I leave them.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Now to this level precinct turn thyself.

LEADER

Unconsecrate it is, and cannot shield me.

THE KING OF ARGOS

We will not yield thee to those falcons' greed.

LEADER

What help? more fierce they are than serpents fell.

THE KING OF ARGOS

We spake thee fair—speak thou them fair in turn.

LEADER

What marvel that we loathe them, scared in soul?

THE KING OF ARGOS

Awe towards a king should other fears transcend.

LEADER

Thus speak, thus act, and reassure my mind.

THE KING OF ARGOS

Not long thy sire shall leave thee desolate.
But I will call the country's indwellers,
And with soft words th' assembly will persuade,
And warn your sire what pleadings will avail.
Therefore abide ye, and with prayer entreat
The country's gods to compass your desire;
The while I go, this matter to provide,
Persuasion and fair fortune at my side.
(*The* KING OF ARGOS *departs with his retinue. The* CHORUS *forms to sing its prayer to Zeus.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

O King of Kings, among the blest
Thou highest and thou happiest,
Listen and grant our prayer,
And, deeply loathing, thrust
Away from us the young men's lust,
And deeply drown
In azure waters, down and ever down,
Benches and rowers dark,
The fatal and perfidious bark!

antistrophe 1

Unto the maidens turn thy gracious care;
Think yet again upon the tale of fame,
How from the maiden loved of thee there sprung
Mine ancient line, long since in many a legend sung!
Remember, O remember, thou whose hand
Did Io by a touch to human shape reclaim.
For from this Argos erst our mother came
Driven hence to Egypt's land,
Yet sprung of Zeus we were, and hence our birth we claim.

strophe 2

And now have I roamed back
Unto the ancient track
Where Io roamed and pastured among flowers,
Watched o'er by Argus' eyes,
Through the lush grasses and the meadow bowers.
Thence, by the gadfly maddened, forth she flies
Unto far lands and alien peoples driven
And, following fate, through paths of foam and surge,
Sees, as she goes, the cleaving strait divide
Greece, from the Eastland riven.

antistrophe 2

And swift through Asian borders doth she urge
Her course, o'er Phrygian mountains' sheep-clipt side;
Thence, where the Mysian realm of Teuthras lies,
Towards Lydian lowlands hies,
And o'er Cilician and Pamphylian hills
And ever-flowing rills,
And thence to Aphrodite's fertile shore,
The land of garnered wheat and wealthy store.

strophe 3

And thence, deep-stung by wild unrest,
By the winged fly that goaded her and drave,
Unto the fertile land, the god-possest
(Where, fed from far-off snows,
Life-giving Nilus flows,
Urged on by Typho's strength, a fertilizing wave),
She roves, in harassed and dishonoured flight,
Scathed by the blasting pangs of Hera's dread despite.

antistrophe 3

And they within the land
With terror shook and wanned,
So strange the sight they saw, and were afraid—
A wild twy-natured thing, half heifer and half maid.

Whose hand was laid at last on Io, thus forlorn,
With many roamings worn?
Who bade the harassed maiden's peace return?

strophe 4

Zeus, lord of time eterne.
Yea, by his breath divine, by his unscathing strength,

She lays aside her bane,
And softened back to womanhood at length
Sheds human tears again.
Then, quickened with Zeus' veritable seed,
A progeny she bare,
A stainless babe, a child of heavenly breed.

antistrophe 4

Of life and fortune fair.
His is the life of life—so all men say,—
His is the seed of Zeus.
Who else had power stern Hera's craft to stay,
Her vengeful curse to loose?

Yea, all from Zeus befel!
And rightly wouldst thou tell
That we from Epaphus, his child, were born:
Justly his deed was done;

strophe 5

Unto what other one,
Of all the gods, should I for justice turn?
From him our race did spring;
Creator he and King,
Ancient of days and wisdom he, and might.
As bark before the wind,
So, wafted by his mind,
Moves every counsel, each device aright.

antistrophe 5

Beneath no stronger hand
Holds he a weak command,
No throne doth he abase him to adore;
Swift as a word, his deed
Acts out what stands decreed
In counsels of his heart, for evermore.

(DANAUS *re-enters.*)

DANAUS

Take heart, my children: the land's heart is kind,
And to full issue has their voting come.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

All hail, my sire; thy word brings utmost joy.
Say, to what issue is the vote made sure,
And how prevailed the people's crowding hands?

DANAUS

With one assent the Argives spake their will,
And, hearing, my old heart took youthful cheer.
The very sky was thrilled when high in air
The concourse raised right hands and swore their oath:—
Free shall the maidens sojourn in this land.
Unharried, undespoiled by mortal wight:
No native hand, no hand of foreigner
Shall drag them hence; if any man use force—
Whoe'er of all our countrymen shall fail
To come unto their aid, let him go forth,
Beneath the people's curse, to banishment.
So did the king of this Pelasgian folk
Plead on behalf of us, and bade them heed
That never, in the after-time, this realm
Should feed to fulness the great enmity
Of Zeus, the suppliants' guard, against itself!
A twofold curse, for wronging stranger-guests
Who are akin withal, confrontingly
Should rise before this city and be shown
A ruthless monster, fed on human doom.
Such things the Argive people heard, and straight,
Without proclaim of herald, gave assent:
Yea, in full conclave, the Pelasgian folk
Heard suasive pleas, and Zeus through them resolved.

(*The* CHORUS *now sings a prayer of thankfulness.*)

CHORUS

Arouse we now to chant our prayer
For fair return of service fair
And Argos' kindly will.
Zeus, lord of guestright, look upon
The grace our stranger lips have won.
In right and truth, as they begun,
Guide them, with favouring hand, until
Thou dost their blameless wish fulfil!

strophe 1

Now may the Zeus-born gods on high
Hear us pour forth
A votive prayer for Argos' clan!—
Never may this Pelasgian earth,
Amid the fire-wrack, shrill the dismal cry

On Ares, ravening lord of fight,
Who in an alien harvest mows down man!
For lo, this land had pity on our plight,
And unto us were merciful and leal,
To us, the piteous flock, who at Zeus' altar kneel!

antistrophe 1

They scornèd not the pleas of maidenhood,
Nor with the young men's will hath their will stood.
They knew right well
Th' unearthly watching fiend invincible,
The foul avenger—let him not draw near!
For he, on roofs ill-starred,
Defiling and polluting, keeps a ghastly ward!
They knew his vengeance, and took holy heed
To us, the sister suppliants, who cry
To Zeus, the lord of purity:
Therefore with altars pure they shall the gods revere.
Thus, through the boughs that shade our lips, fly forth in air,

strophe 2

Fly forth, O eager prayer!
May never pestilence efface
This city's race,
Nor be the land with corpses strewed,
Nor stained with civic blood!
The stem of youth, unpluckt, to manhood come,
Nor Ares rise from Aphrodite's bower,
The lord of death and bane, to waste our youthful flower.

antistrophe 2

Long may the old
Crowd to the altars kindled to consume
Gifts rich and manifold—
Offered to win from powers divine
A benison on city and on shrine:
Let all the sacred might adore
Of Zeus most high, the lord
Of guestright and the hospitable board,
Whose immemorial law doth rule Fate's scales aright:
The garners of earth's store
Be full for evermore,
And grace of Artemis make women's travail light;

strophe 3

No devastating curse of fell disease
This city seize;
No clamour of the State arouse to war
Ares, from whom afar
Shrinketh the lute, by whom the dances fail—
Ares, the lord of wail.
Swarm far aloof from Argos' citizens
All plague and pestilence,
And may the Archer-God our children spare!

antistrophe 3

May Zeus with foison and with fruitfulness
The land's each season bless,
And, quickened with Heaven's bounty manifold,
Teem grazing flock and fold.
Beside the altars of Heaven's hallowing
Loud let the minstrels sing,
And from pure lips float forth the harp-led strain in air!

strophe 4

And let the people's voice, the power
That sways the State, in danger's hour
Be wary, wise for all;
Nor honour in dishonour hold,
But—ere the voice of war be bold—
Let them to stranger peoples grant
Fair and unbloody covenant—
Justice and peace withal;

antistrophe 4

And to the Argive powers divine
The sacrifice of laurelled kine,
By rite ancestral, pay.
Among three words of power and awe,
Stands this, the third, the mighty law—
Your gods, your fathers deified,
Ye shall adore. Let this abide
For ever and for aye.

DANAUS

Dear children, well and wisely have ye prayed;
I bid you now not shudder, though ye hear
New and alarming tidings from your sire.
From this high place beside the suppliants' shrine

The bark of our pursuers I behold,
By divers tokens recognized too well.
Lo, the spread canvas and the hides that screen
The gunwale; lo, the prow, with painted eyes
That seem her onward pathway to descry,
Heeding too well the rudder at the stern
That rules her, coming for no friendly end.
And look, the seamen—all too plain their race—
Their dark limbs gleam from out their snow-white garb;
Plain too the other barks, a fleet that comes
All swift to aid the purpose of the first,
That now, with furled sail and with pulse of oars
Which smite the wave together, comes aland.
But ye, be calm, and, schooled not scared by fear,
Confront this chance, be mindful of your trust
In these protecting gods. And I will hence,
And champions who shall plead your cause aright
Will bring unto your side. There come perchance
Heralds or envoys, eager to lay hand
And drag you captive hence; yet fear them not;
Foiled shall they be. Yet well it were for you
(If, ere with aid I come, I tarry long)
Not by one step this sanctuary to leave.
Farewell, fear nought: soon shall the hour be born
When he that scorns the gods shall rue his scorn.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, but I shudder, father!—ah, even now,
Even as I speak, the swift-winged ships draw nigh!

strophe 1

I shudder, I shiver, I perish with fear:
Overseas though I fled,
Yet nought it avails; my pursuers are near!

DANAUS

Children, take heart; they who decreed to aid
Thy cause will arm for battle, well I ween.

CHORUS

But desperate is Aegyptus' ravening race,
With fight unsated; thou too know'st it well.

antistrophe 1

In their wrath they o'ertake us; the prow is deep-dark
In the which they have sped,
And dark is the bench and the crew of the bark!

DANAUS

Yea but a crew as stout they here shall find,
And arms well steeled beneath a noon-day sun.

CHORUS

Ah yet, O father, leave us not forlorn!
Alone, a maid is nought, a strengthless arm.

strophe 2

With guile they pursue me, with counsel malign,
And unholy their soul;
And as ravens they seize me, unheeding the shrine!

DANAUS

Fair will befall us, children, in this chance,
If thus in wrath they wrong the gods and you.

CHORUS

Alas, nor tridents nor the sanctity
Of shrines will drive them, O my sire, from us!

antistrophe 2

Unholy and daring and cursed is their ire,
Nor own they control
Of the gods, but like jackals they glut their desire!

DANAUS

Ay, but *Come wolf, flee jackal,* saith the saw;
Nor can the flax-plant overbear the corn.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lustful, accursèd, monstrous is their will
As of beasts ravening—'ware we of their power!

DANAUS

Look you, not swiftly puts a fleet to sea,
Nor swiftly to its moorings; long it is
Or e'er the saving cables to the shore
Are borne, and long or e'er the steersmen cry,
The good ship swings at anchor—all is well.
Longest of all, the task to come aland

Where haven there is none, when sunset fades
In night. *To pilot wise,* the adage saith,
Night is a day of wakefulness and pain.
Therefore no force of weaponed men, as yet,
Scatheless can come ashore, before the bark
Lie at her anchorage securely moored.
Bethink thee therefore, nor in panic leave
The shrine of gods whose succour thou hast won.
I go for aid—men shall not blame me long,
Old, but with youth at heart and on my tongue.
(DANAUS *departs as the* CHORUS *sings in terror.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

O land of hill and dale, O holy land,
What shall befall us? whither shall we flee,
From Apian land to some dark lair of earth?

O would that in vapour of smoke I might rise to the clouds of the sky,
That as dust which flits up without wings I might pass and evanish and die!

antistrophe 1

I dare not, I dare not abide: my heart yearns, eager to fly;
And dark is the cast of my thought; I shudder and tremble for fear.
My father looked forth and beheld: I die of the sight that draws near.
And for me be the strangling cord, the halter made ready by Fate,
Before to my body draws nigh the man of my horror and hate.
Nay, ere I will own him as lord, as handmaid to Hades I go!

strophe 2

And oh, that aloft in the sky, where the dark clouds are frozen to snow,
A refuge for me might be found, or a mountain-top smooth and too high
For the foot of the goat, where the vulture sits lonely, and none may descry
The pinnacle veiled in the cloud, the highest and sheerest of all,
Ere to wedlock that rendeth my heart, and love that is loveless, I fall!

antistrophe 2

Yea, a prey to the dogs and the birds of the mount will I give me to be,—
From wailing and curse and pollution it is death, only death, sets me free:
Let death come upon me before to the ravisher's bed I am thrust;
What champion, what saviour but death can I find, or what refuge from lust?

strophe 3

I will utter my shriek of entreaty, a prayer that shrills up to the sky,
That calleth the gods to compassion, a tuneful, a pitiful cry,
That is loud to invoke the releaser. O father, look down on the fight;
Look down in thy wrath on the wronger, with eyes that are eager for right.
Zeus, thou that art lord of the world, whose kingdom is strong over all,
Have mercy on us! At thine altar for refuge and safety we call.

antistrophe 3

For the race of Aegyptus is fierce, with greed and with malice afire;
They cry as the questing hounds, they sweep with the speed of desire.
But thine is the balance of fate, thou rulest the wavering scale,
And without thee no mortal emprise shall have strength to achieve or prevail.

(*The* CHORUS *rushes to the altar during the final part of the song.*)

Alack, alack! the ravisher—[2]
He leaps from boat to beach, he draweth near!
Away, thou plunderer accurst!
Death seize thee first,
Or e'er thou touch me—off! God, hear our cry,
Our maiden agony!
Ah, ah, the touch, the prelude of my shame.
Alas, my maiden fame!
O sister, sister, to the altar cling,
For he that seizeth me,
Grim is his wrath and stern, by land as on the sea.
Guard us, O king!

(*The* HERALD OF AEGYPTUS *enters with attendants. The lines in the following scene between the* HERALD *and the* CHORUS *are sung and are accompanied by a frenzied symbolic dance.*)

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Hence to my barge—step swiftly, tarry not.

CHORUS

Alack, he rends—he rends my hair! O wound on wound!
Help! my lopped head will fall, my blood gush o'er the ground!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Aboard, ye cursèd—with a new curse, go!

CHORUS

Would God that on the wand'ring brine
Thou and this braggart tongue of thine
Had sunk beneath the main—
Thy mast and planks, made fast in vain!
Thee would I drive aboard once more,
A slayer and a dastard, from the shore!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Be still, thou vain demented soul;
My force thy craving shall control.
Away, aboard! What, clingest to the shrine?
Away! this city's gods I hold not for divine.

CHORUS

Aid me, ye gods, that never, never
I may again behold
The mighty, the life-giving river,
Nilus, the quickener of field and fold!
Alack, O sire, unto the shrine I cling—
Shrine of this land from which mine ancient line did spring!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Shrines, shrines, forsooth!—the ship, the ship be shrine!
Aboard, perforce and will-ye nill-ye, go!
Or e'er from hands of mine
Ye suffer torments worse and blow on blow.

CHORUS

Alack, God grant those hands may strive in vain
With the salt-streaming wave,
When 'gainst the wide-blown blasts thy bark shall strain
To round Sarpedon's cape, the sandbank's treach'rous grave.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Shrill ye and shriek unto what gods ye may,
Ye shall not leap from out Aegyptus' bark,
How bitterly soe'er ye wail your woe.

CHORUS

Alack, alack my wrong!
Stern is thy voice, thy vaunting loud and strong.
Thy sire, the mighty Nilus, drive thee hence,
Turning to death and doom thy greedy violence!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Swift to the vessel of the double prow,
Go quickly! let none linger, else this hand
Ruthless will hale you by your tresses hence.

CHORUS

Alack, O father! from the shrine
Not aid but agony is mine.
As a spider he creeps and he clutches his prey,
And he hales me away.
A spectre of darkness, of darkness. Alas and alas! well-a-day!
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Peace! I fear not this country's deities.
They fostered not my childhood nor mine age.

CHORUS

Like a snake that is human he comes, he shudders and crawls to my side:
As an adder that biteth the foot, his clutch on my flesh doth abide.
O Earth, O my mother! O Zeus, thou king of the earth, and her child!
Turn back, we pray thee, from us his clamour and threatenings wild!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Swift each unto the ship; repine no more,
Or my hand shall not spare to rend your robe.

CHORUS

O chiefs, O leaders, aid me, or I yield!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Peace! if ye have not ears to hear my words,
Lo, by these tresses must I hale you hence.

CHORUS

Undone we are, O king! all hope is gone.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Ay, kings enow ye shall behold anon,
Aegyptus' sons—Ye shall not want for kings.
(*The* KING OF ARGOS *enters with his retinue.*)

THE KING OF ARGOS

Sirrah, what dost thou? in what arrogance
Darest thou thus insult Pelasgia's realm?

Deemest thou this a woman-hearted town?
Thou art too full of thy barbarian scorn
For us of Grecian blood, and, erring thus,
Thou dost bewray thyself a fool in all!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
Say thou wherein my deeds transgress my right.

THE KING OF ARGOS
First, that thou play'st a stranger's part amiss.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
Wherein? I do but search and claim mine own.

THE KING OF ARGOS
To whom of our guest-champions hast appealed?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
To Hermes, herald's champion, lord of search.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Yea, to a god—yet dost thou wrong the gods!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
The gods that rule by Nilus I revere.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Hear I aright? our Argive gods are nought?

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
The prey is mine, unless force rend it from me.

THE KING OF ARGOS
At thine own peril touch them—'ware, and soon!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
I hear thy speech, no hospitable word.

THE KING OF ARGOS
I am no host for sacrilegious hands.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS
I will go tell this to Aegyptus' sons.

THE KING OF ARGOS
Tell it! my pride will ponder not thy word.

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Yet, that I have my message clear to say
(For it behoves that heralds' words be clear,
Be they or ill or good), how art thou named?
By whom despoilèd of this sister-band
Of maidens pass I homeward?—speak and say!
For lo, henceforth in Ares' court we stand,
Who judges not by witness but by war:
No pledge of silver now can bring the cause
To issue: ere this thing end, there must be
Corpse piled on corpse and many lives gasped forth.

THE KING OF ARGOS

What skills it that I tell my name to thee?
Thou and thy mates shall learn it ere the end.
Know that if words unstained by violence
Can change these maidens' choice, then mayest thou,
With full consent of theirs, conduct them hence.
But thus the city with one voice ordained—
No force shall bear away the maiden band.
Firmly this word upon the temple wall
Is by a rivet clenched, and shall abide:
Not upon wax inscribed and delible,
Nor upon parchment sealed and stored away.—
Lo, thou hast heard our free mouths speak their will:
Out from our presence—tarry not, but go!

HERALD OF AEGYPTUS

Methinks we stand on some new edge of war:
Be strength and triumph on the young men's side!

THE KING OF ARGOS

Nay but here also shall ye find young men,
Unsodden with the juices oozed from grain.

(*The* HERALD OF AEGYPTUS *and his followers withdraw.*)

But ye, O maids, with your attendants true,
Pass hence with trust into the fencèd town,
Ringed with a wide confine of guarding towers.
Therein are many dwellings for such guests
As the State honours; there myself am housed
Within a palace neither scant nor strait.
There dwell ye, if ye will to lodge at ease
In halls well-thronged: yet, if your soul prefer,

Tarry secluded in a separate home.
Choose ye and cull, from these our proffered gifts,
Whiche'er is best and sweetest to your will:
And I and all these citizens whose vote
Stands thus decreed, will your protectors be.
Look not to find elsewhere more loyal guard.

CHORUS *(singing)*

O godlike chief, God grant my prayer:
Fair blessings on thy proffers fair,
Lord of Pelasgia's race!
Yet, of thy grace, unto our side
Send thou the man of courage tried,
Of counsel deep and prudent thought,—
Be Danaus to his children brought;
For his it is to guide us well
And warn where it behoves to dwell—
What place shall guard and shelter us
From malice and tongues slanderous:
Swift always are the lips of blame
A stranger-maiden to defame—
But Fortune give us grace!

THE KING OF ARGOS

A stainless fame, a welcome kind
From all this people shall ye find:
Dwell therefore, damsels, loved of us,
Within our walls, as Danaus
Allots to each, in order due,
Her dower of attendants true.
(DANAUS *re-enters. A troop of soldiers accompanies him.*)

DANAUS

High thanks, my children, unto Argos con,
And to this folk, as to Olympian gods,
Give offerings meet of sacrifice and wine;
For saviours are they in good sooth to you.
From me they heard, and bitter was their wrath,
How those your kinsmen strove to work you wrong,
And how of us were thwarted: then to me
This company of spearmen did they grant,
That honoured I might walk, nor unaware
Die by some secret thrust and on this land
Bring down the curse of death, that dieth not.

Such boons they gave me: it behoves me pay
A deeper reverence from a soul sincere.
Ye, to the many words of wariness
Spoken by me your father, add this word,
That, tried by time, our unknown company
Be held for honest: over-swift are tongues
To slander strangers, over-light is speech
To bring pollution on a stranger's name.
Therefore I rede you, bring no shame on me
Now when man's eye beholds your maiden prime.
Lovely is beauty's ripening harvest-field,
But ill to guard; and men and beasts, I wot,
And birds and creeping things make prey of it.
And when the fruit is ripe for love, the voice
Of Aphrodite bruiteth it abroad,
The while she guards the yet unripened growth.
On the fair richness of a maiden's bloom
Each passer looks, o'ercome with strong desire,
With eyes that waft the wistful dart of love.
Then be not such our hap, whose livelong toil
Did make our pinnace plough the mighty main:
Nor bring we shame upon ourselves, and joy
Unto my foes. Behold, a twofold home—
One of the king's and one the people's gift—
Unbought, 'tis yours to hold,—a gracious boon.
Go—but remember ye your sire's behest,
And hold your life less dear than chastity.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The gods above grant that all else be well.
But fear not thou, O sire, lest aught befall
Of ill unto our ripened maidenhood.
So long as Heaven have no new ill devised,
From its chaste path my spirit shall not swerve.
(*The members of the* CHORUS *divide into two groups, to sing the final choral lyric responsively.*[8])

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 1

Pass and adore ye the Blessed, the gods of the city who dwell
Around Erasinus, the gush of the swift immemorial tide.

SEMI-CHORUS

Chant ye, O maidens; aloud let the praise of Pelasgia swell;
Hymn we no longer the shores where Nilus to ocean doth glide.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Sing we the bounteous streams that ripple and gush through the city;
Quickening flow they and fertile, the soft new life of the plain.

SEMI-CHORUS

Artemis, maiden most pure, look on us with grace and with pity—
Save us from forced embraces: such love hath no crown but a pain.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 2

Yet not in scorn we chant, but in honour of Aphrodite;
She truly and Hera alone have power with Zeus and control.
Holy the deeds of her rite, her craft is secret and mighty,
And high is her honour on earth, and subtle her sway of the soul.

SEMI-CHORUS

Yea, and her child is Desire: in the train of his mother he goeth—
Yea and Persuasion soft-lipped, whom none can deny or repel:
Cometh Harmonia too, on whom Aphrodite bestoweth
The whispering parley, the paths of the rapture that lovers love well.

SEMI-CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Ah, but I tremble and quake lest again they should sail to reclaim!
Alas for the sorrow to come, the blood and the carnage of war.
Ah, by whose will was it done that o'er the wide ocean they came,
Guided by favouring winds, and wafted by sail and by oar?

SEMI-CHORUS

Peace! for what Fate hath ordained will surely not tarry but come;
Wide is the counsel of Zeus, by no man escaped or withstood:
Only I pray that whate'er, in the end, of this wedlock he doom,
We, as many a maiden of old, may win from the ill to the good.

SEMI-CHORUS

strophe 3

Great Zeus, this wedlock turn from me—
Me from the kinsman bridegroom guard!

SEMI-CHORUS

Come what come may, 'tis Fate's decree.

SEMI-CHORUS
Soft is thy word—the doom is hard.

SEMI-CHORUS
Thou know'st not what the Fates provide.

SEMI-CHORUS
antistrophe 3
How should I scan Zeus' mighty will,
The depth of counsel undescried?

SEMI-CHORUS
Pray thou no word of omen ill.

SEMI-CHORUS
What timely warning wouldst thou teach?

SEMI-CHORUS
Beware, nor slight the gods in speech.

SEMI-CHORUS
strophe 4
Zeus, hold from my body the wedlock detested, the bridegroom abhorred!
It was thou, it was thou didst release
Mine ancestress Io from sorrow: thine healing it was that restored,
The touch of thine hand gave her peace.

SEMI-CHORUS
antistrophe 4
Be thy will for the cause of the maidens! of two ills, the lesser I pray—
The exile that leaveth me pure.
May thy justice have heed to my cause, my prayers to thy mercy find way!
For the hands of thy saving are sure.

NOTES FOR THE SUPPLIANTS

THE Greek text of *The Suppliants* is notoriously corrupt. Readers may be referred to the original printing of Morshead's translation and to other texts and translations of the play for details in regard to the textual problems.

1. It is interesting to note the democratic ideas of government which are attributed to the King of Argos.

2. The Greek text of the following lines is unusually uncertain.

3. Editors differ considerably in their assignment of parts in this final choral passage.

II
THE PERSIANS

Characters in the Play

Atossa, *widow of Darius and mother of* Xerxes
Messenger
Ghost of Darius
Xerxes
Chorus of Persian Elders, *who compose the Persian Council of State*

INTRODUCTION

THE PERSIANS enjoys a unique position among the Greek tragedies which we now possess because it is the only play which deals with historical subject matter. It was presented at Athens in 472 B.C., eight years after the victory of the Greeks at Salamis, which it celebrates, and about twenty years after the composition of *The Suppliants*. Aeschylus has chosen for his setting Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire, at the time when news from the battle was being eagerly awaited. When word finally arrives, the poet conveys to the audience the magnitude of Athens' victory by studying how the Persians react to their overwhelming defeat. He presents first the abject despair of Dowager Queen Atossa, wife of the great Darius and mother of the present King, Xerxes, leader of the ill-starred expedition. The ghost of Darius returns, conjured up from the dead, to join in the lamentation, and finally, at the close of the play Xerxes himself appears, broken and desolate.

Aeschylus was faced with a difficult artistic task in dealing with this subject. He had to present a play which would redound to the greater glory of Athens and at the same time maintain itself upon a level appropriate to tragedy. Perhaps in no other place has he given better evidence of the power of his creative imagination than in this play. As has been pointed out,[1] by placing it at Susa, a spot remote in space, he gains a dignity for his piece which is usually brought about in tragedy by remoteness in time. Then further his praise of Athens is generally by indirection. He mentions none of the great Greeks connected with the battle, not even Themistocles, but at the same time he incorporates into his lines dozens of Persian proper names, whose very size and sound are effective for the poet's purpose. Or again, it seems to be more than simply a dramatic device when Atossa asks, in her speech on page 57, to be told where Athens is.

The play is perhaps most remarkable in that it does not exult over the defeated enemy. In fact, it rather builds up a profound and deep human sympathy for the conquered Persians. Aeschylus seems to have been able to lift himself above the limitations of time and space, and to have seen

[1] Cf. G. Norwood, *Greek Tragedy*, p. 88.

this historical event in its true perspective. Hence he can bring out the universal implications of the Persian catastrophe, and can point with telling effect to the fall of the great Xerxes who has been relentlessly pursued by the Nemesis which always attends *hybris*, great and overweening pride. The poet's capacity to universalize his subject derives ultimately from the breadth and depth of the theological thinking already manifested in *The Suppliants*. He was therefore able to view particular human situations from the vantage point of one who possessed deep-seated belief in the order and purpose of the universe.

THE PERSIANS

(SCENE:—*Before the Council-Hall of the Persian Kings at Susa. The tomb of Darius the Great is visible. The time is 480 B.C., shortly after the battle of Salamis. The play opens with the* CHORUS OF PERSIAN ELDERS *singing its first choral lyric.*)

CHORUS

WHILE o'er the fields of Greece the embattled troops
Of Persia march with delegated sway,
We o'er their rich and gold-abounding seats
Hold faithful our firm guard; to this high charge
Xerxes, our royal lord, the imperial son
Of great Darius, chose our honour'd age.
But for the king's return, and his arm'd host
Blazing with gold, my soul presaging ill
Swells in my tortured breast: for all her force
Hath Asia sent, and for her youth I sigh.
Nor messenger arrives, nor horseman spurs
With tidings to this seat of Persia's kings.
The gates of Susa and Ecbatana
Pour'd forth their martial trains; and Cissia sees
Her ancient towers forsaken, while her youth,
Some on the bounding steed, the tall bark some
Ascending, some with painful march on foot,
Haste on, to arrange the deep'ning files of war.
Amistres, Artaphernes, and the might
Of great Astaspes, Megabazes bold,
Chieftains of Persia, kings, that, to the power
Of the great king obedient, march with these
Leading their martial thousands; their proud steeds
Prance under them; steel bows and shafts their arms,
Dreadful to see, and terrible in fight,
Deliberate valour breathing in their souls.

Artembares, that in his fiery horse
Delights; Masistres; and Imaeus bold,
Bending with manly strength his stubborn bow;
Pharandaces, and Sosthanes, that drives
With military pomp his rapid steeds.
Others the vast prolific Nile hath sent;
Pegastagon, that from Aegyptus draws
His high birth; Susiscanes; and the chief
That reigns o'er sacred Memphis, great Arsames;
And Ariomardus, that o'er ancient Thebes
Bears the supreme dominion; and with these,
Drawn from their watery marshes, numbers train'd
To the stout oar. Next these the Lycian troops,
Soft sons of luxury; and those that dwell
Amid the inland forests, from the sea
Far distant; these Metragathes commands,
And virtuous Arceus, royal chiefs, that shine
In burnish'd gold, and many a whirling car
Drawn by six generous steeds from Sardis lead,
A glorious and a dreadful spectacle.
And from the foot of Tmolus, sacred mount,
Eager to bind on Greece the servile yoke,
Mardon and Tharybis the massy spear
Grasp with unwearied vigour; the light lance
The Mysians shake. A mingled multitude
Swept from her wide dominions skill'd to draw
The unerring bow, in ships Euphrates sends
From golden Babylon. With falchions arm'd
From all the extent of Asia move the hosts
Obedient to their monarch's stern command.
Thus march'd the flower of Persia, whose loved youth
The world of Asia nourish'd, and with sighs
Laments their absence; many an anxious look
Their wives, their parents send, count the slow days,
And tremble at the long-protracted time.

strophe 1

Already o'er the adverse strand
In arms the monarch's martial squadrons spread;
The threat'ning ruin shakes the land,
And each tall city bows its tower'd head.
Bark bound to bark, their wondrous way
They bridge across the indignant sea;

The narrow Hellespont's vex'd waves disdain,
His proud neck taught to wear the chain.
Now has the peopled Asia's warlike lord,
By land, by sea, with foot, with horse,
Resistless in his rapid course,
O'er all their realms his warring thousands pour'd;
Now his intrepid chiefs surveys,
And glitt'ring like a god his radiant state displays.

antistrophe 1

Fierce as the dragon scaled in gold
Through the deep files he darts his glowing eye;
And pleased their order to behold,
His gorgeous standard blazing to the sky,
Rolls onward his Assyrian car,
Directs the thunder of the war,
Bids the wing'd arrows' iron storm advance
Against the slow and cumbrous lance.
What shall withstand the torrent of his sway
When dreadful o'er the yielding shores
The impetuous tide of battle roars,
And sweeps the weak opposing mounds away?
So Persia, with resistless might,
Rolls her unnumber'd hosts of heroes to the fight.

strophe 2

For when misfortune's fraudful hand
Prepares to pour the vengeance of the sky,
What mortal shall her force withstand?
What rapid speed the impending fury fly?
Gentle at first with flatt'ring smiles
She spreads her soft enchanting wiles,
So to her toils allures her destined prey,
Whence man ne'er breaks unhurt away.
For thus from ancient times the Fates ordain
That Persia's sons should greatly dare,
Unequall'd in the works of war;
Shake with their thund'ring steeds the ensanguined plain,
Dreadful the hostile walls surround,
And lay their rampired towers in ruins on the ground.

antistrophe 2

Taught to behold with fearless eyes
The whitening billows foam beneath the gale,

They bid the naval forests rise,
Mount the slight bark, unfurl the flying sail,
And o'er the angry ocean bear
To distant realms the storm of war.
For this with many a sad and gloomy thought
My tortured breast is fraught:
Ah me! for Persia's absent sons I sigh;
For while in foreign fields they fight,
Our towns exposed to wild affright
An easy prey to the invader lie:
Where, mighty Susa, where thy powers,
To wield the warrior's arms, and guard thy regal towers?

epode

Crush'd beneath the assailing foe
Her golden head must Cissia bend;
While her pale virgins, frantic with despair,
Through all her streets awake the voice of wo;
And flying with their bosoms bare,
Their purfled stoles in anguish rend:
For all her youth in martial pride,
Like bees that, clust'ring round their king,
Their dark imbodied squadrons bring,
Attend their sceptred monarch's side,
And stretch across the watery way
From shore to shore their long array.
The Persian dames, with many a tender fear,
In grief's sad vigils keep the midnight hour;
Shed on the widow'd couch the streaming tear,
And the long absence of their loves deplore.
Each lonely matron feels her pensive breast
Throb with desire, with aching fondness glow,
Since in bright arms her daring warrior dress'd
Left her to languish in her love-lorn wo.

Now, ye grave Persians, that your honour'd seats
Hold in this ancient house, with prudent care
And deep deliberation, so the state
Requires, consult we, pond'ring the event
Of this great war, which our imperial lord,
The mighty Xerxes from Darius sprung,
The stream of whose rich blood flows in our veins,
Leads against Greece; whether his arrowy shower

Shot from the strong-braced bow, or the huge spear
High brandish'd, in the deathful field prevails.
But see, the monarch's mother: like the gods
Her lustre blazes on our eyes: my queen,
Prostrate I fall before her: all advance
With reverence, and in duteous phrase address her.
(ATOSSA *enters with her retinue. The Elders do their obeisance to her.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hail, queen, of Persia's high-zoned dames supreme,
Age-honour'd mother of the potent Xerxes,
Imperial consort of Darius, hail!
The wife, the mother of the Persians' god,
If yet our former glories fade not from us.

ATOSSA

And therefore am I come, leaving my house
That shines with gorgeous ornaments and gold,
Where in past days Darius held with me
His royal residence. With anxious care
My heart is tortured: I will tell you, friends,
My thoughts, not otherwise devoid of fear,
Lest mighty wealth with haughty foot o'erturn
And trample in the dust that happiness,
Which, not unbless'd by Heaven, Darius raised.
For this with double force unquiet thoughts
Past utterance fill my soul; that neither wealth
With all its golden stores, where men are wanting,
Claims reverence; nor the light, that beams from power,
Shines on the man whom wealth disdains to grace.
The golden stores of wealth indeed are ours;
But for the light (such in the house I deem
The presence of its lord) there I have fears.
Advise me then, you whose experienced age
Supports the state of Persia: prudence guides
Your councils, always kind and faithful to me.

LEADER

Speak, royal lady, what thy will, assured
We want no second bidding, where our power
In word or deed waits on our zeal: our hearts
In this with honest duty shall obey thee.

ATOSSA

Oft, since my son hath march'd his mighty host
Against the Ionians, warring to subdue
Their country, have my slumbers been disturb'd
With dreams of dread portent; but most last night,
With marks of plainest proof. I'll tell thee then:
Methought two women stood before my eyes
Gorgeously vested, one in Persian robes
Adorn'd, the other in the Doric garb.
With more than mortal majesty they moved,
Of peerless beauty; sisters too they seem'd,
Though distant each from each they chanced to dwell,
In Greece the one, on the barbaric coast
The other. 'Twixt them soon dissension rose:
My son then hasted to compose their strife,
Soothed them to fair accord, beneath his car
Yokes them, and reins their harness'd necks. The one,
Exulting in her rich array, with pride
Arching her stately neck, obey'd the reins;
The other with indignant fury spurn'd
The car, and dash'd it piecemeal, rent the reins,
And tore the yoke asunder; down my son
Fell from the seat, and instant at his side
His father stands, Darius, at his fall
Impress'd with pity: him when Xerxes saw,
Glowing with grief and shame he rends his robes.
This was the dreadful vision of the night.
When I arose, in the sweet-flowing stream
I bathed my hands, and on the incensed altars
Presenting my oblations to the gods
To avert these ills, an eagle I behold
Fly to the altar of the sun; aghast
I stood, my friends, and speechless; when a hawk
With eager speed runs thither, furious cuffs
The eagle with his wings, and with his talons
Unplumes his head; meantime the imperial bird
Cowers to the blows defenceless. Dreadful this
To me that saw it, and to you that hear.
My son, let conquest crown his arms, would shine
With dazzling glory; but should Fortune frown,
The state indeed presumes not to arraign
His sovereignty; yet how, his honour lost,
How shall he sway the sceptre of this land?

LEADER

We would not, royal lady, sink thy soul
With fear in the excess, nor raise it high
With confidence. Go then, address the gods;
If thou hast seen aught ill, entreat their power
To avert that ill, and perfect ev'ry good
To thee, thy sons, the state, and all thy friends.
Then to the earth, and to the mighty dead
Behooves thee pour libations; gently call
Him that was once thy husband, whom thou saw'st
In visions of the night; entreat his shade
From the deep realms beneath to send to light
Triumph to thee and to thy son; whate'er
Bears other import, to inwrap, to hide it
Close in the covering earth's profoundest gloom.
This, in the presage of my thoughts that flow
Benevolent to thee, have I proposed;
And all, we trust, shall be successful to thee.

ATOSSA

Thy friendly judgment first hath placed these dreams
In a fair light, confirming the event
Benevolent to my son and to my house.
May all the good be ratified! These rites
Shall, at thy bidding, to the powers of heaven,
And to the manes of our friends, be paid
In order meet, when I return; meanwhile
Indulge me, friends, who wish to be inform'd
Where, in what clime, the towers of Athens rise.

LEADER

Far in the west, where sets the imperial sun.

ATOSSA

Yet my son will'd the conquest of this town.

LEADER

May Greece through all her states bend to his power!

ATOSSA

Send they embattled numbers to the field?

LEADER

A force that to the Medes hath wrought much wo.

ATOSSA

Have they sufficient treasures in their houses?

LEADER

Their rich earth yields a copious fount of silver.

ATOSSA

From the strong bow wing they the barbed shaft?

LEADER

They grasp the stout spear, and the massy shield.

ATOSSA

What monarch reigns, whose power commands their ranks?

LEADER

Slaves to no lord, they own no kingly power.[1]

ATOSSA

How can they then resist the invading foe?

LEADER

As to spread havoc through the numerous host,
That round Darius form'd their glitt'ring files.

ATOSSA

Thy words strike deep, and wound the parent's breast
Whose sons are march'd to such a dangerous field.

LEADER

But, if I judge aright, thou soon shalt hear
Each circumstance; for this way, mark him, speeds
A Persian messenger; he bears, be sure,
Tidings of high import, or good or ill.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Wo to the towns through Asia's peopled realms!
Wo to the land of Persia, once the port
Of boundless wealth, how is thy glorious state
Vanish'd at once, and all thy spreading honours
Fall'n, lost! Ah me! unhappy is his task
That bears unhappy tidings: but constraint
Compels me to relate this tale of wo.
Persians, the whole barbaric host is fall'n.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
O horror, horror! What a baleful train
Of recent ills! Ah, Persians, as he speaks
Of ruin, let your tears stream to the earth.

MESSENGER
It is ev'n so, all ruin; and myself,
Beyond all hope returning, view this light.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
How tedious and oppressive is the weight
Of age, reserved to hear these hopeless ills!

MESSENGER
I speak not from report; but these mine eyes
Beheld the ruin which my tongue would utter.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Wo, wo is me! Then has the iron storm,
That darken'd from the realms of Asia, pour'd
In vain its arrowy shower on sacred Greece.

MESSENGER
In heaps the unhappy dead lie on the strand
Of Salamis, and all the neighbouring shores.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Unhappy friends, sunk, perish'd in the sea;
Their bodies, mid the wreck of shatter'd ships,
Mangled, and rolling on the encumber'd waves!

MESSENGER
Naught did their bows avail, but all the troops
In the first conflict of the ships were lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Raise the funereal cry, with dismal notes
Wailing the wretched Persians. Oh, how ill
They plann'd their measures, all their army perish'd!

MESSENGER
O Salamis, how hateful is thy name!
And groans burst from me when I think of Athens.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
How dreadful to her foes! Call to remembrance
How many Persian dames, wedded in vain,
Hath Athens of their noble husbands widow'd?

ATOSSA
Astonied with these ills, my voice thus long
Hath wanted utterance: griefs like these exceed
The power of speech or question: yet ev'n such,
Inflicted by the gods, must mortal man
Constrain'd by hard necessity endure.
But tell me all, without distraction tell me,
All this calamity, though many a groan
Burst from thy labouring heart. Who is not fallen?
What leader must we wail? What sceptred chief
Dying hath left his troops without a lord?

MESSENGER
Xerxes himself lives, and beholds the light.

ATOSSA
That word beams comfort on my house, a ray
That brightens through the melancholy gloom.

MESSENGER
Artembares, the potent chief that led
Ten thousand horse, lies slaughtered on the rocks
Of rough Sileniae. The great Dadaces,
Beneath whose standard march'd a thousand horse,
Pierced by a spear, fell headlong from the ship.
Tenagon, bravest of the Bactrians, lies
Roll'd on the wave-worn beach of Ajax' isle.[2]
Lilaeus, Arsames, Argestes, dash
With violence in death against the rocks
Where nest the silver doves. Arcteus, that dwelt
Near to the fountains of the Egyptian Nile,
Adeues, and Pheresba, and Pharnuchus
Fell from one ship. Matallus, Chrysa's chief,
That led his dark'ning squadrons, thrice ten thousand,
On jet-black steeds, with purple gore distain'd
The yellow of his thick and shaggy beard.
The Magian Arabus, and Artames
From Bactra, mould'ring on the dreary shore
Lie low. Amistris, and Amphistreus there

Grasps his war-wearied spear; there prostrate lies
The illustrious Ariomardus; long his loss
Shall Sardis weep: thy Mysian Sisames,
And Tharybis, that o'er the burden'd deep
Led five times fifty vessels; Lerna gave
The hero birth, and manly grace adorn'd
His pleasing form, but low in death he lies
Unhappy in his fate. Syennesis,
Cilicia's warlike chief, who dared to front
The foremost dangers, singly to the foes
A terror, there too found a glorious death.
These chieftains to my sad remembrance rise,
Relating but a few of many ills.

ATOSSA

This is the height of ill, ah me! and shame
To Persia, grief, and lamentation loud.
But tell me this, afresh renew thy tale:
What was the number of the Grecian fleet,
That in fierce conflict their bold barks should dare
Rush to encounter with the Persian hosts.

MESSENGER

Know then, in numbers the barbaric fleet
Was far superior: in ten squadrons, each
Of thirty ships, Greece plough'd the deep; of these
One held a distant station. Xerxes led
A thousand ships; their number well I know;
Two hundred more, and seven, that swept the seas
With speediest sail: this was their full amount.
And in the engagement seem'd we not secure
Of victory? But unequal fortune sunk
Our scale in fight, discomfiting our host.

ATOSSA

The gods preserve the city of Minerva.

MESSENGER

The walls of Athens are impregnable,
Their firmest bulwarks her heroic sons.

ATOSSA

Which navy first advanced to the attack?
Who led to the onset, tell me; the bold Greeks,
Or, glorying in his numerous fleet, my son?

MESSENGER

Our evil genius, lady, or some god
Hostile to Persia, led to ev'ry ill.
Forth from the troops of Athens came a Greek,
And thus address'd thy son, the imperial Xerxes:—
"Soon as the shades of night descend, the Grecians
Shall quit their station; rushing to their oars
They mean to separate, and in secret flight
Seek safety." At these words, the royal chief,
Little conceiving of the wiles of Greece
And gods averse, to all the naval leaders
Gave his high charge:—"Soon as yon sun shall cease
To dart his radiant beams, and dark'ning night
Ascends the temple of the sky, arrange
In three divisions your well-ordered ships,
And guard each pass, each outlet of the seas:
Others enring around this rocky isle
Of Salamis. Should Greece escape her fate,
And work her way by secret flight, your heads
Shall answer the neglect." This harsh command
He gave, exulting in his mind, nor knew
What Fate design'd. With martial discipline
And prompt obedience, snatching a repast,
Each mariner fix'd well his ready oar.
Soon as the golden sun was set, and night
Advanced, each train'd to ply the dashing oar,
Assumed his seat; in arms each warrior stood,
Troop cheering troop through all the ships of war.
Each to the appointed station steers his course;
And through the night his naval force each chief
Fix'd to secure the passes. Night advanced,
But not by secret flight did Greece attempt
To escape. The morn, all beauteous to behold,
Drawn by white steeds bounds o'er the enlighten'd earth;
At once from ev'ry Greek with glad acclaim
Burst forth the song of war, whose lofty notes
The echo of the island rocks return'd,
Spreading dismay through Persia's hosts, thus fallen
From their high hopes; no flight this solemn strain
Portended, but deliberate valour bent
On daring battle; while the trumpet's sound
Kindled the flames of war. But when their oars
The paean ended, with impetuous force

Dash'd the resounding surges, instant all
Rush'd on in view: in orderly array
The squadron on the right first led, behind
Rode their whole fleet; and now distinct we heard
From ev'ry part this voice of exhortation:—
"Advance, ye sons of Greece, from thraldom save
Your country, save your wives, your children save,
The temples of your gods, the sacred tomb
Where rest your honour'd ancestors; this day
The common cause of all demands your valour."
Meantime from Persia's hosts the deep'ning shout
Answer'd their shout; no time for cold delay;
But ship 'gainst ship its brazen beak impell'd.
First to the charge a Grecian galley rush'd;
Ill the Phoenician bore the rough attack,
Its sculptured prow all shatter'd. Each advanced
Daring an opposite. The deep array
Of Persia at the first sustain'd the encounter;
But their throng'd numbers, in the narrow seas
Confined, want room for action; and, deprived
Of mutual aid, beaks clash with beaks, and each
Breaks all the other's oars: with skill disposed
The Grecian navy circled them around
With fierce assault; and rushing from its height
The inverted vessel sinks: the sea no more
Wears its accustomed aspect, with foul wrecks
And blood disfigured; floating carcasses
Roll on the rocky shores: the poor remains
Of the barbaric armament to flight
Ply every oar inglorious: onward rush
The Greeks amid the ruins of the fleet,
As through a shoal of fish caught in the net,
Spreading destruction: the wide ocean o'er
Wailings are heard, and loud laments, till night
With darkness on her brow brought grateful truce.
Should I recount each circumstance of wo,
Ten times on my unfinished tale the sun
Would set; for be assured that not one day
Could close the ruin of so vast a host.

ATOSSA

Ah, what a boundless sea of wo hath burst
On Persia, and the whole barbaric race!

MESSENGER

These are not half, not half our ills; on these
Came an assemblage of calamities,
That sunk us with a double weight of wo.

ATOSSA

What fortune can be more unfriendly to us
Than this? Say on, what dread calamity
Sunk Persia's host with greater weight of wo.

MESSENGER

Whoe'er of Persia's warriors glow'd in prime
Of vig'rous youth, or felt their generous souls
Expand with courage, or for noble birth
Shone with distinguish'd lustre, or excell'd
In firm and duteous loyalty, all these
Are fall'n, ignobly, miserably fall'n.

ATOSSA

Alas, their ruthless fate, unhappy friends!
But in what manner, tell me, did they perish?

MESSENGER

Full against Salamis an isle arises,[3]
Of small circumference, to the anchor'd bark
Unfaithful; on the promontory's brow,
That overlooks the sea, Pan loves to lead
The dance: to this the monarch sends these chiefs,
That when the Grecians from their shatter'd ships
Should here seek shelter, these might hew them down
An easy conquest, and secure the strand
To their sea-wearied friends; ill judging what
The event: but when the fav'ring god to Greece
Gave the proud glory of this naval fight,
Instant in all their glitt'ring arms they leap'd
From their light ships, and all the island round
Encompass'd, that our bravest stood dismay'd;
While broken rocks, whirl'd with tempestuous force,
And storms of arrows crush'd them; then the Greeks
Rush to the attack at once, and furious spread
The carnage, till each mangled Persian fell.
Deep were the groans of Xerxes when he saw
This havoc; for his seat, a lofty mound
Commanding the wide sea, o'erlook'd his hosts.

With rueful cries he rent his royal robes,
And through his troops embattled on the shore
Gave signal of retreat; then started wild,
And fled disorder'd. To the former ills
These are fresh miseries to awake thy sighs.

ATOSSA

Invidious Fortune, how thy baleful power
Hath sunk the hopes of Persia! Bitter fruit
My son hath tasted from his purposed vengeance
On Athens, famed for arms; the fatal field
Of Marathon, red with barbaric blood,
Sufficed not; that defeat he thought to avenge,
And pull'd this hideous ruin on his head.
But tell me, if thou canst, where didst thou leave
The ships that happily escaped the wreck?

MESSENGER

The poor remains of Persia's scatter'd fleet
Spread ev'ry sail for flight, as the wind drives,
In wild disorder; and on land no less
The ruin'd army; in Boeotia some,
With thirst oppress'd, at Crene's cheerful rills
Were lost; forespent with breathless speed some pass
The fields of Phocis, some the Doric plain,
And near the gulf of Melia, the rich vale
Through which Sperchius rolls his friendly stream.
Achaea thence and the Thessalian state
Received our famish'd train; the greater part
Through thirst and hunger perish'd there, oppress'd
At once by both: but we our painful steps
Held onwards to Magnesia, and the land
Of Macedonia, o'er the ford of Axius,
And Bolbe's sedgy marshes, and the heights
Of steep Pangaeos, to the realms of Thrace.
That night, ere yet the season, breathing frore,
Rush'd winter, and with ice incrusted o'er
The flood of sacred Strymon: such as own'd
No god till now, awe-struck, with many a prayer
Adored the earth and sky. When now the troops
Had ceased their invocations to the gods,
O'er the stream's solid crystal they began
Their march; and we, who took our early way,
Ere the sun darted his warm beams, pass'd safe:

But when his burning orb with fiery rays
Unbound the middle current, down they sunk
Each over other; happiest he who found
The speediest death: the poor remains, that 'scaped,
With pain through Thrace dragg'd on their toilsome march,
A feeble few, and reach'd their native soil;
That Persia sighs through all her states, and mourns
Her dearest youth. This is no feigned tale:
But many of the ills, that burst upon us
In dreadful vengeance, I refrain to utter.

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O Fortune, heavy with affliction's load,
How hath thy foot crush'd all the Persian race!

ATOSSA

Ah me, what sorrows for our ruin'd host
Oppress my soul! Ye visions of the night
Haunting my dreams, how plainly did you show
These ills!—You set them in too fair a light.
Yet, since your bidding hath in this prevail'd,
First to the gods wish I to pour my prayers,
Then to the mighty dead present my off'rings,
Bringing libations from my house: too late,
I know, to change the past; yet for the future,
If haply better fortune may await it,
Behooves you, on this sad event, to guide
Your friends with faithful counsels. Should my son
Return ere I have finish'd, let your voice
Speak comfort to him; friendly to his house
Attend him, nor let sorrow rise on sorrows.

(ATOSSA *and her retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Awful sovereign of the skies,
When now o'er Persia's numerous host
Thou badest the storm with ruin rise,
All her proud vaunts of glory lost,
Ecbatana's imperial head
By thee was wrapp'd in sorrow's dark'ning shade;
Through Susa's palaces with loud lament,
By their soft hands their veils all rent,

The copious tear the virgins pour,
That trickles their bare bosoms o'er.
From her sweet couch up starts the widow'd bride,
Her lord's loved image rushing on her soul,
Throws the rich ornaments of youth aside,
And gives her griefs to flow without control:
Her griefs not causeless; for the mighty slain
Our melting tears demand, and sorrow-soften'd strain.

antistrophe

Now her wailings wide despair
Pours these exhausted regions o'er:
Xerxes, ill-fated, led the war;
Xerxes, ill-fated, leads no more;
Xerxes sent forth the unwise command,
The crowded ships unpeopled all the land;
That land, o'er which Darius held his reign,
Courting the arts of peace, in vain,
O'er all his grateful realms adored,
The stately Susa's gentle lord.
Black o'er the waves his burden'd vessels sweep,
For Greece elate the warlike squadrons fly;
Now crush'd, and whelm'd beneath the indignant deep
The shatter'd wrecks and lifeless heroes lie:
While, from the arms of Greece escaped, with toil
The unshelter'd monarch roams o'er Thracia's dreary soil.

epode

The first in battle slain
By Cychrea's craggy shore
Through sad constraint, ah me! forsaken lie,
All pale and smear'd with gore:—
Raise high the mournful strain,
And let the voice of anguish pierce the sky:—
Or roll beneath the roaring tide,
By monsters rent of touch abhorr'd;
While through the widow'd mansion echoing wide
Sounds the deep groan, and wails its slaughter'd lord:
Pale with his fears the helpless orphan there
Gives the full stream of plaintive grief to flow;
While age its hoary head in deep despair
Bends, list'ning to the shrieks of wo.
With sacred awe
The Persian law

No more shall Asia's realms revere;
To their lord's hand
At his command,
No more the exacted tribute bear.
Who now falls prostrate at the monarch's throne?
His regal greatness is no more.
Now no restraint the wanton tongue shall own,
Free from the golden curb of power;
For on the rocks, wash'd by the beating flood,
His awe commanding nobles lie in blood.
(ATOSSA *returns, clad in the garb of mourning; she carries offerings for the tomb of Darius.*)

ATOSSA

Whoe'er, my friends, in the rough stream of life
Hath struggled with affliction, thence is taught
That, when the flood begins to swell, the heart
Fondly fears all things; when the fav'ring gale
Of Fortune smooths the current, it expands
With unsuspecting confidence, and deems
That gale shall always breathe. So to my eyes
All things now wear a formidable shape,
And threaten from the gods: my ears are pierced
With sounds far other than of song. Such ills
Dismay my sick'ning soul: hence from my house
Nor glitt'ring car attends me, nor the train
Of wonted state, while I return, and bear
Libations soothing to the father's shade
In the son's cause; delicious milk, that foams
White from the sacred heifer; liquid honey,
Extract of flowers; and from its virgin fount
The running crystal; this pure draught, that flow'd
From the ancient vine, of power to bathe the spirits
In joy; the yellow olive's fragrant fruit,
That glories in its leaves' unfading verdure;
With flowers of various hues, earth's fairest offspring
Inwreathed. But you, my friends, amid these rites
Raise high your solemn warblings, and invoke
Your lord, divine Darius; I meanwhile
Will pour these off'rings to the infernal gods.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Yes, royal lady, Persia's honour'd grace,
To earth's dark chambers pour thy off'rings: we

With choral hymns will supplicate the powers
That guide the dead, to be propitious to us.
And you, that o'er the realms of night extend
Your sacred sway, thee mighty earth, and thee
Hermes; thee chief, tremendous king, whose throne
Awes with supreme dominion, I adjure:
Send, from your gloomy regions, send his shade
Once more to visit this ethereal light;
That he alone, if aught of dread event
He sees yet threat'ning Persia, may disclose
To us poor mortals Fate's extreme decree.

Hears the honour'd godlike king?
These barbaric notes of wo,
Taught in descant sad to ring,
Hears he in the shades below?
Thou, O Earth, and you, that lead
Through your sable realms the dead,
Guide him as he takes his way,
And give him to the ethereal light of day!

Let the illustrious shade arise
Glorious in his radiant state,
More than blazed before our eyes,
Ere sad Susa mourn'd his fate.
Dear he lived, his tomb is dear,
Shrining virtues we revere:
Send then, monarch of the dead,
Such as Darius was, Darius' shade.

He in realm-unpeopling war
Wasted not his subjects' blood,
Godlike in his will to spare,
In his councils wise and good.
Rise then, sovereign lord, to light;
On this mound's sepulchral height
Lift thy sock in saffron died,
And rear thy rich tiara's regal pride!

Great and good, Darius, rise:
Lord of Persia's lord, appear:
Thus involved with thrilling cries
Come, our tale of sorrow hear!

War her Stygian pennons spreads,
Brooding darkness o'er our heads;
For stretch'd along the dreary shore
The flow'r of Asia lies distain'd with gore.

Rise, Darius, awful power;
Long for thee our tears shall flow.
Why thy ruin'd empire o'er
Swells this double flood of wo?
Sweeping o'er the azure tide
Rode thy navy's gallant pride:
Navy now no more, for all
Beneath the whelming wave—

(*While the* CHORUS *sings,* ATOSSA *performs her ritual by the tomb. As the song concludes the* GHOST OF DARIUS *appears from the tomb.*)

GHOST OF DARIUS

Ye faithful Persians, honour'd now in age,
Once the companions of my youth, what ills
Afflict the state? The firm earth groans, it opes,
Disclosing its vast deeps; and near my tomb
I see my wife: this shakes my troubled soul
With fearful apprehensions; yet her off'rings
Pleased I receive. And you around my tomb
Chanting the lofty strain, whose solemn air
Draws forth the dead, with grief-attemper'd notes
Mournfully call me: not with ease the way
Leads to this upper air; and the stern gods,
Prompt to admit, yield not a passage back
But with reluctance: much with them my power
Availing, with no tardy step I come.
Say then, with what new ill doth Persia groan?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

My wonted awe o'ercomes me; in thy presence
I dare not raise my eyes, I dare not speak.

GHOST OF DARIUS

Since from the realms below, by thy sad strains
Adjured, I come, speak; let thy words be brief;
Say whence thy grief, tell me unawed by fear.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
I dread to forge a flattering tale, I dread
To grieve thee with a harsh offensive truth.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Since fear hath chained his tongue, high-honour'd dame,
Once my imperial consort, check thy tears,
Thy griefs, and speak distinctly. Mortal man
Must bear his lot of wo; afflictions rise
Many from sea, many from land, if life
Be haply measured through a lengthen'd course.

ATOSSA
O thou that graced with Fortune's choicest gifts
Surpassing mortals, while thine eye beheld
Yon sun's ethereal rays, livedst like a god
Bless'd amid thy Persians; bless'd I deem thee now
In death, ere sunk in this abyss of ills,
Darius, hear at once our sum of wo;
Ruin through all her states hath crush'd thy Persia.

GHOST OF DARIUS
By pestilence, or faction's furious storms?

ATOSSA
Not so: near Athens perish'd all our troops.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Say, of my sons, which led the forces thither?

ATOSSA
The impetuous Xerxes, thinning all the land.

GHOST OF DARIUS
By sea or land dared he this rash attempt?

ATOSSA
By both: a double front the war presented.

GHOST OF DARIUS
A host so vast what march conducted o'er?

ATOSSA
From shore to shore he bridged the Hellespont.

GHOST OF DARIUS
What! could he chain the mighty Bosphorus?

ATOSSA
Ev'n so, some god assisting his design.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Some god of power to cloud his better sense.

ATOSSA
The event now shows what mischiefs he achieved.

GHOST OF DARIUS
What suffer'd they, for whom your sorrows flow?

ATOSSA
His navy sunk spreads ruin through the camp.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Fell all his host beneath the slaught'ring spear?

ATOSSA
Susa, through all her streets, mourns her lost sons.

GHOST OF DARIUS
How vain the succour, the defence of arms?

ATOSSA
In Bactra age and grief are only left.

GHOST OF DARIUS
Ah, what a train of warlike youth is lost!

ATOSSA
Xerxes, astonished, desolate, alone—

GHOST OF DARIUS
How will this end? Nay, pause not. Is he safe?

ATOSSA
Fled o'er the bridge, that join'd the adverse strands.

GHOST OF DARIUS
And reach'd this shore in safety? Is this true?

ATOSSA
True are thy words, and not to be gainsay'd.

GHOST OF DARIUS
With what a winged course the oracles
Haste their completion! With the lightning's speed

Jove on my son hath hurled his threaten'd vengeance:
Yet I implored the gods that it might fall
In time's late process: but when rashness drives
Impetuous on, the scourge of Heaven upraised
Lashes the Fury forward; hence these ills
Pour headlong on my friends. Not weighing this,
My son, with all the fiery pride of youth,
Hath quickened their arrival, while he hoped
To bind the sacred Hellespont, to hold
The raging Bosphorus, like a slave, in chains,
And dared the advent'rous passage, bridging firm
With links of solid iron his wondrous way,
To lead his numerous host; and swell'd with thoughts
Presumptuous, deem'd, vain mortal! that his power
Should rise above the gods' and Neptune's might.
And was not this the phrensy of the soul?
But much I fear lest all my treasured wealth
Fall to some daring hand an easy prey.

ATOSSA

This from too frequent converse with bad men
The impetuous Xerxes learn'd; these caught his ear
With thy great deeds, as winning for thy sons
Vast riches with thy conquering spear, while he
Tim'rous and slothful, never, save in sport,
Lifted his lance, nor added to the wealth
Won by his noble fathers. This reproach
Oft by bad men repeated, urged his soul
To attempt this war, and lead his troops to Greece.

GHOST OF DARIUS

Great deeds have they achieved, and memorable
For ages: never hath this wasted state
Suffer'd such ruin, since heaven's awful king
Gave to one lord Asia's extended plains
White with innumerous flocks, and to his hands
Consign'd the imperial sceptre. Her brave hosts
A Mede first led; the virtues of his son
Fix'd firm the empire, for his temperate soul
Breathed prudence. Cyrus next, by fortune graced,
Adorn'd the throne, and bless'd his grateful friends
With peace: he to his mighty monarchy
Join'd Lydia, and the Phrygians; to his power
Ionia bent reluctant; but the gods

With victory his gentle virtues crown'd
His son then wore the regal diadem.
Next to disgrace his country, and to stain
The splendid glories of this ancient throne,
Rose Mardus: him, with righteous vengeance fired
Artaphernes, and his confederate chiefs
Crush'd in his palace: Maraphis assumed
The sceptre: after him Artaphernes.
Me next to this exalted eminence,
Crowning my great ambition, Fortune raised.
In many a glorious field my glittering spear
Flamed in the van of Persia's numerous hosts;
But never wrought such ruin to the state.
Xerxes, my son, in all the pride of youth
Listens to youthful counsels, my commands
No more remember'd; hence, my hoary friends,
Not the whole line of Persia's sceptred lords,
You know it well, so wasted her brave sons.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Why this? To what fair end are these thy words
Directed? Sovereign lord, instruct thy Persians
How, mid this ruin, best to guide their state.

GHOST OF DARIUS

No more 'gainst Greece lead your embattled hosts;
Not though your deep'ning phalanx spreads the field
Outnumb'ring theirs: their very earth fights for them.

LEADER

What may thy words import? How fight for them?

GHOST OF DARIUS

With famine it destroys your cumbrous train.

LEADER

Choice levies, prompt for action, will we send.

GHOST OF DARIUS

Those, in the fields of Greece that now remain,
Shall not revisit safe the Persian shore.

LEADER

What! shall not all the host of Persia pass
Again from Europe o'er the Hellespont?

GHOST OF DARIUS

Of all their numbers few, if aught avails
The faith of heaven-sent oracles to him
That weighs the past, in their accomplishment
Not partial: hence he left, in faithless hope
Confiding, his selected train of heroes.
These have their station where Asopus flows
Wat'ring the plain, whose grateful currents roll
Diffusing plenty through Boeotia's fields.
There misery waits to crush them with the load
Of heaviest ills, in vengeance for their proud
And impious daring; [4] for where'er they held
Through Greece their march, they fear'd not to profane
The statues of the gods; their hallow'd shrines
Emblazed, o'erturn'd their altars, and in ruins,
Rent from their firm foundations, to the ground
Levell'd their temples; such their frantic deeds,
Nor less their suff'rings; greater still await them;
For Vengeance hath not wasted all her stores;
The heap yet swells; for in Plataea's plains
Beneath the Doric spear the clotted mass
Of carnage shall arise, that the high mounds,
Piled o'er the dead, to late posterity
Shall give this silent record to men's eyes,
That proud aspiring thoughts but ill beseem
Weak mortals: for oppression, when it springs,
Puts forth the blade of vengeance, and its fruit
Yields a ripe harvest of repentant wo.
Behold this vengeance, and remember Greece,
Remember Athens: henceforth let not pride,
Her present state disdaining, strive to grasp
Another's, and her treasured happiness
Shed on the ground: such insolent attempts
Awake the vengeance of offended Jove.
But you, whose age demands more temperate thoughts,
With words of well-placed counsel teach his youth
To curb that pride, which from the gods calls down
Destruction on his head. (*To* ATOSSA) And thou, whose age
The miseries of thy Xerxes sink with sorrow,
Go to thy house, thence choose the richest robe,
And meet thy son; for through the rage of grief
His gorgeous vestments from his royal limbs
Are foully rent. With gentlest courtesy

Soothe his affliction; for his duteous ear,
I know, will listen to thy voice alone.
Now to the realms of darkness I descend.
My ancient friends, farewell, and mid these ills
Each day in pleasures bathe your drooping spirits,
For treasured riches naught avail the dead.
(*The* GHOST OF DARIUS *vanishes into the tomb.*)

LEADER

These many present, many future ills
Denounced on Persia, sink my soul with grief.

ATOSSA

Unhappy fortune, what a tide of ills
Bursts o'er me! Chief this foul disgrace, which shows
My son divested of his rich attire,
His royal robes all rent, distracts my thoughts.
But I will go, choose the most gorgeous vest,
And haste to meet my son. Ne'er in his woes
Will I forsake whom my soul holds most dear.
(ATOSSA *departs as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Ye powers that rule the skies,
Memory recalls our great, our happy fate,
Our well-appointed state,
The scenes of glory opening to our eyes,
When this vast empire o'er
The good Darius, with each virtue bless'd
That forms a monarch's breast,
Shielding his subjects with a father's care,
Invincible in war,
Extended like a god his awful power,
Then spread our arms their glory wide,
Guarding to peace her golden reign:
Each tower'd city saw with pride
Safe from the toils of war her homeward-marching train.

antistrophe 1

Nor Haly's shallow strand
He pass'd, nor from his palace moved his state;
He spoke; his word was Fate.
What strong-based cities could his might withstand?

Not those that lift their heads
Where to the sea the floods of Strymon pass,
Leaving the huts of Thrace;
Nor those, that far the extended ocean o'er
Stand girt with many a tower;
Nor where the Hellespont his broad wave spreads;
Nor the firm bastions' rampired might,
Whose foot the deep Propontis laves;
Nor those, that glorying in their height
Frown o'er the Pontic sea, and shade his darken'd waves.

strophe 2

Each sea-girt isle around
Bow'd to this monarch: humbled Lesbos bow'd;
Paros, of its marble proud;
Naxos with vines, with olives Samos crown'd:
Him Myconos adored;
Chios, the seat of beauty; Andros steep,
That stretches o'er the deep
To meet the wat'ry Tenos; him each bay
Bound by the Icarian sea,
Him Melos, Gnidus, Rhodes confess'd their lord;
O'er Cyprus stretch'd his sceptred hand:
Paphos and Solos own'd his power,
And Salamis, whose hostile strand,
The cause of all our wo, is red with Persian gore.

antistrophe 2

Ev'n the proud towns, that rear'd
Sublime along the Ionian coast their towers,
Where wealth her treasures pours,
Peopled from Greece, his prudent reign revered.
With such unconquer'd might
His hardy warriors shook the embattled fields,
Heroes that Persia yields,
And those from distant realms that took their way,
And wedged in close array
Beneath his glitt'ring banners claim'd the fight.
But now these glories are no more:
Farewell the big war's plumed pride:
The gods have crush'd this trophied power;
Sunk are our vanquish'd arms beneath the indignant tide.

(XERXES *enters, with a few followers. His royal raiment is torn. The entire closing scene is sung or chanted.*)

XERXES

Ah me, how sudden have the storms of Fate,
Beyond all thought, all apprehension, burst
On my devoted head! O Fortune, Fortune!
With what relentless fury hath thy hand
Hurl'd desolation on the Persian race!
Wo unsupportable! The torturing thought
Of our lost youth comes rushing on my mind,
And sinks me to the ground. O Jove, that I
Had died with those brave men that died in fight!

CHORUS

O thou afflicted monarch, once the lord
Of marshall'd armies, of the lustre beam'd
From glory's ray o'er Persia, of her sons
The pride, the grace, whom ruin now hath sunk
In blood! The unpeopled land laments her youth
By Xerxes led to slaughter, till the realms
Of death are gorged with Persians; for the flower
Of all the realm, thousands, whose dreadful bows
With arrowy shower annoy'd the foe, are fall'n.

XERXES

Your fall, heroic youths, distracts my soul.

CHORUS

And Asia sinking on her knee, O king,
Oppress'd, with griefs oppress'd, bends to the earth.

XERXES

And I, O wretched fortune, I was born
To crush, to desolate my ruin'd country!

CHORUS

I have no voice, no swelling harmony,
No descant, save these notes of wo,
Harsh, and responsive to the sullen sigh,
Rude strains, that unmelodious flow,
To welcome thy return.

XERXES

Then bid them flow, bid the wild measures flow
Hollow, unmusical, the notes of grief;
They suit my fortune, and dejected state.

CHORUS

Yes, at thy royal bidding shall the strain
Pour the deep sorrows of my soul;
The suff'rings of my bleeding country plain,
And bid the mournful measures roll.
Again the voice of wild despair
With thrilling shrieks shall pierce the air;
For high the god of war his flaming crest
Raised, with the fleet of Greece surrounded,
The haughty arms of Greece with conquest bless'd,
And Persia's wither'd force confounded,
Dash'd on the dreary beach her heroes slain,
Or whelm'd them in the darken'd main.

XERXES

To swell thy griefs ask ev'ry circumstance.

CHORUS

Where are thy valiant friends, thy chieftains where?
Pharnaces, Susas, and the might
Of Pelagon, and Dotamas? The spear
Of Agabates bold in fight?
Psammis in mailed cuirass dress'd,
And Susiscanes' glitt'ring crest?

XERXES

Dash'd from the Tyrian vessel on the rocks
Of Salamis they sunk, and smear'd with gore
The heroes on the dreary strand are stretch'd.

CHORUS

Where is Pharnuchus? Ariomardus where,
With ev'ry gentle virtue graced?
Lilaeus, that from chiefs renown'd in war
His high-descended lineage traced?
Where rears Sebalces his crown-circled head:
Where Tharybis to battles bred,
Artembares, Hystaechmes bold,
Memphis, Masistres sheath'd in gold?

XERXES

Wretch that I am! These on the abhorred town
Ogygian Athens, roll'd their glowing eyes
Indignant; but at once in the fierce shock
Of battle fell, dash'd breathless on the ground.

CHORUS

There does the son of Batanochus lie,
Through whose rich veins the unsullied blood
Of Susamus, down from the lineage high
Of noble Mygabatas flow'd:
Alpistus, who with faithful care
Number'd the deep'ning files of war,
The monarch's eye; on the ensanguined plain
Low is the mighty warrior laid?
Is great Aebares 'mong the heroes slain,
And Partheus number'd with the dead?—
Ah me! those bursting groans, deep-charged with wo,
The fate of Persia's princes show.

XERXES

To my grieved memory thy mournful voice,
Tuned to the saddest notes of wo, recalls
My brave friends lost; and my rent heart returns
In dreadful symphony the sorrowing strain.

CHORUS

Yet once more shall I ask thee, yet once more,
Where is the Mardian Xanthes' might,
The daring chief, that from the Pontic shore
Led his strong phalanx to the fight?
Anchares where, whose high-raised shield
Flamed foremost in the embattled field?
Where the high leaders of thy mail-clad horse,
Daixis and Arsaces where?
Where Cigdagatas and Lythimnas' force,
Waving untired his purple spear?

XERXES

Entomb'd, I saw them in the earth entomb'd;
Nor did the rolling car with solemn state
Attend their rites: I follow'd: low they lie
(Ah me, the once great leaders of my host!),
Low in the earth, without their honours lie.

CHORUS

O wo, wo, wo! Unutterable wo
The demons of revenge have spread;
And Ate from her drear abode below
Rises to view the horrid deed.

XERXES

Dismay, and rout, and ruin, ills that wait
On man's afflicted fortune, sink us down.

CHORUS

Dismay, and rout, and ruin on us wait,
And all the vengeful storms of Fate:
Ill flows on ill, on sorrows sorrows rise;
Misfortune leads her baleful train;
Before the Ionian squadrons Persia flies,
Or sinks ingulf'd beneath the main.
Fall'n, fall'n is her imperial power,
And conquest on her banners waits no more.

XERXES

At such a fall, such troops of heroes lost,
How can my soul but sink in deep despair!
Cease thy sad strain.

CHORUS

Is all thy glory lost?

XERXES

Seest thou these poor remains of my rent robes?

CHORUS

I see, I see.

XERXES

And this ill-furnish'd quiver?

CHORUS

Wherefore preserved?

XERXES

To store my treasured arrows.

CHORUS

Few, very few.

XERXES

And few my friendly aids.

CHORUS

I thought these Grecians shrunk appall'd at arms.

XERXES

No: they are bold and daring: these sad eyes
Beheld their violent and deathful deeds.

CHORUS

The ruin, sayst thou, of thy shattered fleet?

XERXES

And in the anguish of my soul I rent
My royal robes.

CHORUS

Wo, wo!

XERXES

And more than wo.

CHORUS

Redoubled, threefold wo!

XERXES

Disgrace to me,
But triumph to the foe.

CHORUS

Are all thy powers
In ruin crush'd?

XERXES

No satrap guards me now.

CHORUS

Thy faithful friends sunk in the roaring main.

XERXES

Weep, weep their loss, and lead me to my house;
Answer my grief with grief, an ill return
Of ills for ills. Yet once more raise that strain
Lamenting my misfortunes; beat thy breast,
Strike, heave the groan; awake the Mysian strain
To notes of loudest wo; rend thy rich robes,
Pluck up thy beard, tear off thy hoary locks,
And bathe thine eyes in tears: thus through the streets
Solemn and slow with sorrow lead my steps;
Lead to my house, and wail the fate of Persia.

CHORUS

Yes, once more at thy bidding shall the strain
Pour the deep sorrows of my soul;
The suff'rings of my bleeding country plain,
And bid the Mysian measures roll.
Again the voice of wild despair
With thrilling shrieks shall pierce the air;
For high the god of war his flaming crest
Raised, with the fleet of Greece surrounded,
The haughty arms of Greece with conquest bless'd,
And Persia's withered force confounded,
Dash'd on the dreary beach her heroes slain,
Or whelm'd them in the darken'd main.

NOTES FOR THE PERSIANS

THE translation of R. Potter was first published in 1777. There are therefore certain outmoded spellings in his text, particularly in the case of the Persian proper names. Potter's divisions of the choral passages into strophe and antistrophe have been maintained.

1. Lines such as this reflect the pride which Athens took in her democratic institutions.

2. The reference is to the island of Salamis, the reputed birthplace of Ajax, son of Telamon.

3. The island is Psyttalea.

4. Darius is foretelling the results of the battle of Plataea in 479 B.C.

III
THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

Characters in the Play

Eteocles, *son of Oedipus, King of Thebes*
A Spy
Chorus of Theban Women
Antigone, Ismene } *sisters of* Eteocles
A Herald

INTRODUCTION

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES, presented first in 467 B.C., is the third and only surviving play of a trilogy, which won the first prize in the contest for tragedy in that year. The first and second plays were the *Laïus* and the *Oedipus,* and the three were followed by a satyr-play entitled *The Sphinx.* There is every evidence that the piece was extremely popular in antiquity, even though Aristophanes in his *Frogs,* lines 1021 ff., has made it the butt of some genial satiric thrusts, directed against the highly elevated diction of the play and its military subject matter. Although the play is similar to the *Oresteia* in that it portrays the workings of a curse upon a house, *The Seven Against Thebes* does not achieve the heights reached by the poet in his later masterpiece.

The Theban legend, from which Aeschylus drew his plot, tells how Laius, king of Thebes, disobeyed the oracle of Apollo which warned him that if he begot a child, ruin would fall upon his house and upon his kingdom. A child, Oedipus, was born and the curse began to operate. Though his parents exposed him as an infant on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron, his life was saved by a friendly shepherd. So it happened that he reached manhood, unwittingly slew his father, returned to Thebes where likewise unwittingly he married his mother, Jocasta. Four children were born of this incestuous union, two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. When finally the truth became known, Jocasta took her own life and Oedipus inflicted blindness on himself. His sons, who were to share the power of Thebes, maltreated their aged and broken father, who before his death pronounced the curse that they should die by each other's hands. Eteocles, who first held the kingly power, would not allow Polyneices to bear sway in his rightful turn, and thrust him in exile from Thebes. As the play begins, Polyneices has brought a supporting host from Argos, and is besieging the city, determined to assert his rights by force.

The play itself, which is simple in structure, delineates first the psychological state of the inhabitants in the besieged city. The maidens of Thebes, who make up the Chorus, at first are terror-stricken, but the king, Eteocles, sharply rebukes them and succeeds in restoring their

morale. The remainder of the drama records the successful defence of the city and the fate of the two brothers. There is a final scene in which Antigone insists on giving due rites of burial to the body of Polyneices, to whom such rites had been denied by a decree of the Theban leaders, on the ground that he had attacked his native city. Many scholars have argued that this scene is a later addition and not from the hand of Aeschylus, since it resembles most closely the *Antigone* of Sophocles which contains a full-length treatment of precisely this theme.

The Seven Against Thebes is significant among the plays of Aeschylus largely because of the characterization of Eteocles. Here for the first time we meet what might be called a "tragic hero." Eteocles is presented as a good and devoted king, loyal to his people and eager to protect them from their enemies. His full nature, however, is brought out in the play in the scene which follows the description of Polyneices as he approaches to attack the city. Eteocles, almost crazed with hatred for his brother, finally goes forth to meet him. He does so, despite the Chorus' efforts to deter him, and with the full knowledge in his heart that both he and his brother will be destroyed by their father's curse. Though Aeschylus in the play does not focus his attention sharply upon the familiar phenomenon of life, that sin or evil-doing possesses the peculiar capacity to reproduce itself even to the third and fourth generations (a phenomenon which the Greeks called a curse upon a house), nevertheless largely through his delineation of Eteocles' character, the poet achieves for his piece the magnitude and scale indispensable to tragedy.

THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

(SCENE:—*Within the Citadel of Thebes. There is an altar with the statues of several gods visible. A crowd of citizens are present as* ETEOCLES *enters with his attendants.*)

ETEOCLES

CLANSMEN of Cadmus, at the signal given
By time and season must the ruler speak
Who sets the course and steers the ship of State
With hand upon the tiller, and with eye
Watchful against the treachery of sleep.
For if all go aright, *thank Heaven,* men say,
But if adversely—which may God forefend!—
One name on many lips, from street to street,
Would bear the bruit and rumour of the time,
Down with Eteocles!—a clamorous curse,
A dirge of ruin. May averting Zeus
Make good his title here, in Cadmus' hold!
You it beseems now—boys unripened yet
To lusty manhood, men gone past the prime
And increase of the full begetting seed,
And those whom youth and manhood well combined
Array for action—all to rise in aid
Of city, shrines, and altars of all powers
Who guard our land; that ne'er, to end of time,
Be blotted out the sacred service due
To our sweet mother-land and to her brood.
For she it was who to their guest-right called
Your waxing youth, was patient of the toil,
And cherished you on the land's gracious lap,
Alike to plant the hearth and bear the shield
In loyal service, for an hour like this.
Mark now! until to-day, luck rules our scale;

For we, though long beleaguered, in the main
Have with our sallies struck the foemen hard.
But now the seer, the feeder of the birds
(Whose art unerring and prophetic skill
Of ear and mind divines their utterance
Without the lore of fire interpreted)
Foretelleth, by the mastery of his art,
That now an onset of Achaea's host
Is by a council of the night designed
To fall in double strength upon our walls.
Up and away, then, to the battlements,
The gates, the bulwarks! don your panoplies,
Array you at the breast-work, take your stand
On the floorings of the towers, and with good heart
Stand firm for sudden sallies at the gates,
Nor hold too heinous a respect for hordes
Sent on you from afar: some god will guard!
I too, for shrewd espial of their camp,
Have sent forth scouts, and confidence is mine
They will not fail nor tremble at their task,
And, with their news, I fear no foeman's guile.
(*A* Spy *enters.*)

The Spy

Eteocles, high king of Cadmus' folk,
I stand here with news certified and sure
From Argos' camp, things by myself descried.
Seven warriors yonder, doughty chiefs of might,
Into the crimsoned concave of a shield
Have shed a bull's blood, and, with hands immersed
Into the gore of sacrifice, have sworn
By Ares, lord of fight, and by thy name,
Blood-lapping Terror, *Let our oath be heard—*
Either to raze the walls, make void the hold
Of Cadmus—strive his children as they may—
Or, dying here, to make the foemen's land
With blood impasted. Then, as memory's gift
Unto their parents at the far-off home,
Chaplets they hung upon Adrastus' car,
With eyes tear-dropping, but no word of moan.
For their steeled spirit glowed with high resolve,
As lions pant, with battle in their eyes.
For them, no weak alarm delays the clear

Issues of death or life! I parted thence
Even as they cast the lots, how each should lead,
Against which gate, his serried company.
Rank then thy bravest, with what speed thou may'st,
Hard by the gates, to dash on them, for now,
Full-armed, the onward ranks of Argos come!
The dust whirls up, and from their panting steeds
White foamy flakes like snow bedew the plain.
Thou therefore, chieftain! like a steersman skilled,
Enshield the city's bulwarks, ere the blast
Of war comes darting on them! hark, the roar
Of the great landstorm with its waves of men!
Take Fortune by the forelock! for the rest,
By yonder dawn-light will I scan the field
Clear and aright, and surety of my word
Shall keep thee scatheless of the coming storm.

ETEOCLES

O Zeus and Earth and city-guarding gods,
And thou, my father's Curse, of baneful might,
Spare ye at least this town, nor root it up,
By violence of the foemen, stock and stem!
For here, from home and hearth, rings Hellas' tongue.
Forbid that e'er the yoke of slavery
Should bow this land of freedom, Cadmus' hold!
Be ye her help! your cause I plead with mine—
A city saved doth honour to her gods!

(ETEOCLES, *his attendants and most of the crowd go out. The* CHORUS OF THEBAN WOMEN *enters. They appear terror-stricken.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

I wail in the stress of my terror, and shrill is my cry of despair.
The foemen roll forth from their camp as a billow, and onward they bear!
Their horsemen are swift in the forefront, the dust rises up to the sky,
A signal, though speechless, of doom, a herald more clear than a cry!
Hoof-trampled, the land of my love bears onward the din to mine ears.
As a torrent descending a mountain, it thunders and echoes and nears!
The doom is unloosened and cometh! O kings and O queens of high Heaven,
Prevail that it fall not upon us! the sign for their onset is given—
They stream to the walls from without, white-shielded and keen for the fray.

They storm to the citadel gates—what god or what goddess can stay
The rush of their feet? to what shrine shall I bow me in terror and pray?

(*They rush to pray to the gods.*)

O gods high-thronèd in bliss, we must crouch at the shrines in your home!
Not here must we tarry and wail: shield clashes on shield as they come—
And now, even now is the hour for the robes and the chaplets of prayer!
Mine eyes feel the flash of the sword, the clang is instinct with the spear!
Is thy hand set against us, O Ares, in ruin and wrath to o'erwhelm
Thine own immemorial land, O god of the golden helm?
Look down upon us, we beseech thee, on the land that thou lovest of old.

strophe 1

And ye, O protecting gods, in pity your people behold!
Yea, save us, the maidenly troop, from the doom and despair of the slave,
For the crests of the foemen come onward, their rush is the rush of a wave
Rolled on by the War-god's breath! almighty one, hear us and save
From the grasp of the Argives' might! to the ramparts of Cadmus they crowd,
And, clenched in the teeth of the steeds, the bits clink horror aloud!
And seven high chieftains of war, with spear and with panoply bold,
Are set, by the law of the lot, to storm the seven gates of our hold!

antistrophe 1

Be near and befriend us, O Pallas, the Zeus-born maiden of might!
O lord of the steed and the sea, be thy trident uplifted to smite
In eager desire of the fray, Poseidon! and Ares come down,
In fatherly presence revealed, to rescue Harmonia's town!
Thine too, Aphrodite, we are! thou art mother and queen of our race,
To thee we cry out in our need, from thee let thy children have grace!
Ye too, to scare back the foe, be your cry as a wolf's howl wild,
Thou, O the wolf-lord, and thou, of she-wolf Leto the child!

strophe 2

Woe and alack for the sound, for the rattle of cars to the wall,
And the creak of the griding axles! O Hera, to thee is our call!
Artemis, maiden beloved! the air is distraught with the spears,
And whither doth destiny drive us, and where is the goal of our fears?

antistrophe 2

The blast of the terrible stones on the ridge of our wall is not stayed,
At the gates is the brazen clash of the bucklers—Apollo to aid!
Thou too, O daughter of Zeus, who guidest the wavering fray
To the holy decision of fate, Athena! be with us to-day!
Come down to the sevenfold gates and harry the foemen away!

strophe 3

O gods and O sisters of gods, our bulwark and guard! we beseech
That ye give not our war-worn hold to a rabble of alien speech!
List to the call of the maidens, the hands held up for the right,

antistrophe 3

Be near us, protect us, and show that the city is dear in your sight!
Have heed for her sacrifice holy, and thought of her offerings take,
Forget not her love and her worship, be near her and smite for her sake!

(ETEOCLES *and his retinue re-enter.*)

ETEOCLES (*addressing the* CHORUS)

Hark to my question, things detestable!
Is this aright and for the city's weal,
And helpful to our army thus beset,
That ye before the statues of our gods
Should fling yourselves, and scream and shriek your fears?
Immodest, uncontrolled! Be this my lot—
Never in troublous nor in peaceful days
To dwell with aught that wears a female form!
Where womankind has power, no man can house,
Where womankind feeds panic, ruin rules
Alike in house and city! Look you now—
Your flying feet, and rumour of your fears,
Have spread a soulless panic on our walls,
And they without do go from strength to strength,
And we within make breach upon ourselves!
Such fate it brings, to house with womankind.
Therefore if any shall resist my rule—
Or man, or woman, or some sexless thing—
The vote of sentence shall decide their doom,
And stones of execution, past escape,
Shall finish all. Let not a woman's voice
Be loud in council! for the things without,
A man must care; let women keep within—
Even then is mischief all too probable!
Hear ye? or speak I to unheeding ears?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, but I shudder, child of Oedipus!
I heard the clash and clang!
The axles rolled and rumbled; woe to us,
Fire-welded bridles rang!

ETEOCLES

Say—when a ship is strained and deep in brine,
Did e'er a seaman mend his chance, who left
The helm, t' invoke the image at the prow?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, but I fled to the shrines, I called to our helpers on high,
When the stone-shower roared at the portals!
I sped to the temples aloft, and loud was my call and my cry,
Look down and deliver, Immortals!

ETEOCLES

Ay, pray amain that stone may vanquish steel!
Where not that grace of gods? ay, ay—methinks,
When cities fall, the gods go forth from them!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, let me die, or ever I behold
The gods go forth, in conflagration dire!
The foemen's rush and raid, and all our hold
Wrapt in the burning fire!

ETEOCLES

Cry not on Heaven, in impotent debate!
What saith the saw?—*Good saving Strength, in verity,*
Out of Obedience breeds the babe Prosperity.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

'Tis true: yet stronger is the power divine,
And oft, when man's estate is overbowed
With bitter pangs, disperses from his eyne
The heavy, hanging cloud!

ETEOCLES

Let men with sacrifice and augury
Approach the gods, when comes the tug of war:
Maids must be silent and abide within.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

By grace of the gods we hold it, a city untamed of the spear,
And the battlement wards from the wall the foe and his aspect of fear!
What need of displeasure herein?

ETEOCLES

Ay, pay thy vows to Heaven; I grudge them not,
But—so thou strike no fear into our men—
Have calm at heart, nor be too much afraid.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alack, it is fresh in mine ears, the clamour and crash of the fray,
And up to our holiest height I sped on my timorous way,
Bewildered, beset by the din!

ETEOCLES

Now, if ye hear the bruit of death or wounds,
Give not yourselves o'ermuch to shriek and scream,
For Ares ravins upon human flesh.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, but the snorting of the steeds I hear!

ETEOCLES

Then, if thou hearest, hear them not too well!

LEADER

Hark, the earth rumbles, as they close us round!

ETEOCLES

Enough if I am here, with plans prepared.

LEADER

Alack, the battering at the gates is loud!

ETEOCLES

Peace! stay your tongue, or else the town may hear!

LEADER

O warders of the walls, betray them not!

ETEOCLES

Beshrew your cries! in silence face your fate.

LEADER

Gods of our city, see me not enslaved!

ETEOCLES

On me, on all, thy cries bring slavery.

LEADER

Zeus, strong to smite, turn upon foes thy blow!

ETEOCLES

Zeus, what a curse are women, wrought by thee!

LEADER

Weak wretches, even as men, when cities fall.

ETEOCLES

What! clasping gods, yet voicing thy despair?

LEADER

In the sick heart, fear maketh prey of speech.

ETEOCLES

Light is the thing I ask thee—do my will!

LEADER

Ask swiftly: swiftly shall I know my power.

ETEOCLES

Silence, weak wretch! nor put thy friends in fear.

LEADER

I speak no more: the general fate be mine!

ETEOCLES

I take that word as wiser than the rest.
Nay, more: these images possess thy will—
Pray, in their strength, that Heaven be on our side!
Then hear my prayers withal, and then ring out
The female triumph-note, thy privilege—
Yea, utter forth the usage Hellas knows,
The cry beside the altars, sounding clear
Encouragement to friends, alarm to foes.
But I unto all gods that guard our walls,
Lords of the plain or warders of the mart
And to Ismenus' stream and Dirce's rills,
I swear, if Fortune smiles and saves our town,
That we will make our altars reek with blood
Of sheep and kine, shed forth unto the gods,
And with victorious tokens front our fanes—
Corslets and casques that once our foemen wore,
Spear-shattered now—to deck these holy homes!
Be such thy vows to Heaven—away with sighs,
Away with outcry vain and barbarous,
That shall avail not, in a general doom!
But I will back, and, with six chosen men
Myself the seventh, to confront the foe
In this great aspect of a poisèd war,
Return and plant them at the sevenfold gates,
Or e'er the prompt and clamorous battle-scouts
Haste to inflame our counsel with the need.

(ETEOCLES *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

I mark his words, yet, dark and deep,
My heart's alarm forbiddeth sleep!
Close-clinging cares around my soul
Enkindle fears beyond control,
Presageful of what doom may fall
From the great leaguer of the wall!
So a poor dove is faint with fear
For her weak nestlings, while anew
Glides on the snaky ravisher!
In troop and squadron, hand on hand,
They climb and throng, and hemmed we stand,
While on the warders of our town
The flinty shower comes hurtling down!
Gods born of Zeus! put forth your might
For Cadmus' city, realm, and right!

antistrophe 1

What nobler land shall e'er be yours,
If once ye give to hostile powers
The deep rich soil, and Dirce's wave,
The nursing stream, Poseidon gave
And Tethys' children? Up and save!
Cast on the ranks that hem us round
A deadly panic, make them fling
Their arms in terror on the ground,
And die in carnage! thence shall spring
High honour for our clan and king!
Come at our wailing cry, and stand
As thronèd sentries of our land!

strophe 2

For pity and sorrow it were that this immemorial town
Should sink to be slave of the spear, to dust and to ashes gone down,
By the gods of Achaean worship and arms of Achaean might
Sacked and defiled and dishonoured, its women the prize of the fight—
That, haled by the hair as a steed, their mantles dishevelled and torn,
The maiden and matron alike should pass to the wedlock of scorn!
I hear it arise from the city, the manifold wail of despair—
Woe, woe for the doom that shall be—as in grasp of the foeman they fare!

antistrophe 2

For a woe and a weeping it is, if the maiden inviolate flower
Is plucked by the foe in his might, not culled in the bridal bower!
Alas for the hate and the horror—how say it?—less hateful by far
Is the doom to be slain by the sword, hewn down in the carnage of war!
For wide, ah! wide is the woe when the foeman has mounted the wall;
There is havoc and terror and flame, and the dark smoke broods over all,
And wild is the war-god's breath, as in frenzy of conquest he springs,
And pollutes with the blast of his lips the glory of holiest things!

strophe 3

Up to the citadel rise clash and din,
The war-net closes in,
The spear is in the heart: with blood imbrued
Young mothers wail aloud,
For children at their breast who scream and die!
And boys and maidens fly,
Yet scape not the pursuer, in his greed
To thrust and grasp and feed!
Robber with robber joins, each calls his mate
Unto the feast of hate—
The banquet, lo! is spread—seize, rend, and tear!
No need to choose or share!

antistrophe 3

And all the wealth of earth to waste is poured—
A sight by all abhorred!
The grieving housewives eye it; heaped and blent,
Earth's boons are spoiled and spent,
And waste to nothingness; and O alas,
Young maids, forlorn ye pass—
Fresh horror at your hearts—beneath the power
Of those who crop the flower!
Ye own the ruffian ravisher for lord,
And night brings rites abhorred!
Woe, woe for you! upon your grief and pain
There comes a fouler stain.

(*On one side* The Spy *enters; on the other,* Eteocles *and the* Six Champions.)

Leader of the First Semi-Chorus

Look, friends! methinks the scout, who parted hence
To spy upon the foemen, comes with news,
His feet as swift as wafting chariot-wheels.

LEADER OF THE SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Ay, and our king, the son of Oedipus,
Comes prompt to time, to learn the spy's report—
His heart is fainer than his foot is fast!

THE SPY

Well have I scanned the foe, and well can say
Unto which chief, by lot, each gate is given.
Tydeus already with his onset-cry .
Storms at the gate called Proetides; but him
The seer Amphiaraus holds at halt,
Nor wills that he should cross Ismenus' ford,
Until the sacrifices promise fair.
But Tydeus, mad with lust of blood and broil,
Like to a cockatrice at noontide hour,
Hisses out wrath and smites with scourge of tongue
The prophet-son of Oecleus—*Wise thou art,*
Faint against war, and holding back from death!
With such revilings loud upon his lips
He waves the triple plumes that o'er his helm
Float overshadowing, as a courser's mane;
And at his shield's rim, terror in their tone,
Clang and reverberate the brazen bells.
And this proud sign, wrought on his shield, he bears—[1]
The vault of heaven, inlaid with blazing stars;
And, for the boss, the bright moon glows at full,
The eye of night, the first and lordliest star.
Thus with high-vaunted armour, madly bold,
He clamours by the stream-bank, wild for war,
As a steed panting grimly on his bit,
Held in and chafing for the trumpet's bray!
Whom wilt thou set against him? when the gates
Of Proetus yield, who can his rush repel?

ETEOCLES

To me, no blazon on a foeman's shield
Shall e'er present a fear! such pointed threats
Are powerless to wound; his plumes and bells,
Without a spear, are snakes without a sting.
Nay, more—that pageant of which thou tellest—
The nightly sky displayed, ablaze with stars,
Upon his shield, palters with double sense—
One headstrong fool will find its truth anon!

For, if night fall upon his eyes in death,
Yon vaunting blazon will its own truth prove,
And he is prophet of his folly's fall.
Mine shall it be, to pit against his power
The loyal son of Astacus, as guard
To hold the gateways—a right valiant soul,
Who has in heed the throne of Modesty
And loathes the speech of Pride, and evermore
Shrinks from the base, but knows no other fear.
He springs by stock from those whom Ares spared,
The men called Sown, a right son of the soil,
And Melanippus styled. Now, what his arm
To-day shall do, rests with the dice of war,
And Ares shall ordain it; but his cause
Hath the true badge of Right, to urge him on
To guard, as son, his motherland from wrong.

(MELANIPPUS *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Then may the gods give fortune fair
Unto our chief, sent forth to dare
War's terrible arbitrament!
But ah! when champions wend away,
I shudder, lest, from out the fray,
Only their blood-stained wrecks be sent!

THE SPY

Nay, let him pass, and the gods' help be his!
Next, Capaneus comes on, by lot to lead
The onset at the gates Electran styled:
A giant he, more huge than Tydeus' self,
And more than human in his arrogance—
May fate forefend his threat against our walls!
God willing, or unwilling—such his vaunt—
I will lay waste this city; Pallas' self,
Zeus's warrior maid, although she swoop to earth
And plant her in my path, shall stay me not.
And, for the flashes of the levin-bolt,
He holds them harmless as the noontide rays.
Mark, too, the symbol on his shield—a man
Scornfully weaponless but torch in hand,
And the flame glows within his grasp, prepared
For ravin: lo, the legend, wrought in words,

Fire for the city bring I, flares in gold!
Against such wight, send forth—yet whom? what man
Will front that vaunting figure and not fear?

ETEOCLES

Aha, this profits also, gain on gain!
In sooth, for mortals, the tongue's utterance
Bewrays unerringly a foolish pride!
Hither stalks Capaneus, with vaunt and threat
Defying god-like powers, equipt to act,
And, mortal though he be, he strains his tongue
In folly's ecstasy, and casts aloft
High swelling words against the ears of Zeus.
Right well I trust—if justice grants the word—
That, by the might of Zeus, a bolt of flame
In more than semblance shall descend on him.
Against his vaunts, though reckless, I have set,
To make assurance sure, a warrior stern—
Strong Polyphontes, fervid for the fray;—
A sturdy bulwark, he, by grace of Heaven
And favour of his champion Artemis!
Say on, who holdeth the next gate in ward?

(POLYPHONTES *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Perish the wretch whose vaunt affronts our home!
On him the red bolt come,
Ere to the maiden bowers his way he cleave,
To ravage and bereave!

THE SPY

I will say on. Eteoclus is third—
To him it fell, what time the third lot sprang
O'er the inverted helmet's brazen rim,
To dash his stormers on Neistae gate.
He wheels his mares, who at their frontlets chafe
And yearn to charge upon the gates amain.
They snort the breath of pride, and, filled therewith,
Their nozzles whistle with barbaric sound.
High too and haughty is his shield's device—
An armèd man who climbs, from rung to rung,
A scaling ladder, up a hostile wall,
Afire to sack and slay; and he too cries
(By letters, full of sound, upon the shield)

Not Ares' self shall cast me from the wall.
Look to it, send, against this man, a man
Strong to debar the slave's yoke from our town.

ETEOCLES (*pointing to* MEGAREUS)
Send will I—even this man, with luck to aid—

(MEGAREUS *departs as soon as he has been marked out.*)

By his worth sent already, not by pride
And vain pretence, is he. 'Tis Megareus,
The child of Creon, of the Earth-sprung born!
He will not shrink from guarding of the gates,
Nor fear the maddened charger's frenzied neigh,
But, if he dies, will nobly quit the score
For nurture to the land that gave him birth,
Or from the shield-side hew two warriors down—
Eteoclus and the figure that he lifts—
Ay, and the city pictured, all in one,
And deck with spoils the temple of his sire!
Announce the next pair, stint not of thy tongue!

CHORUS (*chanting*)
O thou, the warder of my home,
Grant, unto us, Fate's favouring tide,
Send on the foemen doom!
They fling forth taunts of frenzied pride,
On them may Zeus with glare of vengeance come!

THE SPY
Lo, next him stands a fourth and shouts amain,
By Pallas Onca's portal, and displays
A different challenge; 'tis Hippomedon!
Huge the device that starts up from his targe
In high relief; and, I deny it not,
I shuddered, seeing how, upon the rim,
It made a mighty circle round the shield—
No sorry craftsman he, who wrought that work
And clamped it all around the buckler's edge!
The form was Typhon: from his glowing throat
Rolled lurid smoke, spark-litten, kin of fire!
The flattened edge-work, circling round the whole,
Made strong support for coiling snakes that grew
Erect above the concave of the shield:
Loud rang the warrior's voice; inspired for war,

He raves to slay, as doth a Bacchanal,
His very glance a terror! of such wight
Beware the onset! closing on the gates,
He peals his vaunting and appalling cry!

ETEOCLES

Yet first our Pallas Onca—wardress she,
Planting her foot hard by her gate—shall stand,
The Maid against the ruffian, and repel
His force, as from her brood the mother-bird
Beats back the wintered serpent's venom'd fang.
And next, by her, is Oenops' gallant son,
Hyperbius, chosen to confront this foe,
Ready to seek his fate at Fortune's shrine!
In form, in valour, and in skill of arms,
None shall gainsay him. See how wisely well
Hermes hath set the brave against the strong!
Confronted shall they stand, the shield of each
Bearing the image of opposing gods:
One holds aloft his Typhon breathing fire,
But, on the other's shield, in symbol sits
Zeus, calm and strong, and fans his bolt to flame—
Zeus, seen of all, yet seen of none to fail!
Howbeit, weak is trust reposed in Heaven—
Yet are we upon Zeus' victorious side,
The foe, with those he worsted—if in sooth
Zeus against Typhon held the upper hand,
And if Hyperbius (as well may hap
When two such foes such diverse emblems bear)
Have Zeus upon his shield, a saving sign.

(HYPERBIUS *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

High faith is mine that he whose shield
Bears, against Zeus, the thing of hate.
The giant Typhon, thus revealed,
A monster loathed of gods eterne
And mortal men—this doom shall earn
A shattered skull, before the gate!

THE SPY

Heaven send it so! A fifth assailant now
Is set against our fifth, the northern, gate,
Fronting the death-mound where Amphion lies

The child of Zeus. This foeman vows his faith,
Upon a mystic spear-head which he deems
More holy than a godhead and more sure
To find its mark than any glance of eye,
That, will they, nill they, he will storm and sack
The hold of the Cadmeans. Such his oath—
His, the bold warrior, yet of childish years,
A bud of beauty's foremost flower, the son
Of Zeus and of the mountain maid. I mark
How the soft down is waxing on his cheek,
Thick and close-growing in its tender prime—
In name, not mood, is he a maiden's child—
Parthenopaeus; large and bright his eyes
But fierce the wrath wherewith he fronts the gate:
Yet not unheralded he takes his stand
Before the portal; on his brazen shield,
The rounded screen and shelter of his form,
I saw him show the ravening Sphinx, the fiend
That shamed our city—how it glared and moved,
Clamped on the buckler, wrought in high relief!
And in its claws did a Cadmean bear—
Nor heretofore, for any single prey,
Sped she aloft, through such a storm of darts
As now awaits her. So our foe is here—
Like, as I deem, to ply no stinted trade
In blood and broil, but traffick as is meet
In fierce exchange for his long wayfaring!

ETEOCLES

Ah, may they meet the doom they think to bring—
They and their impious vaunts—from those on high!
So should they sink, hurled down to deepest death!
This foe, at least, by thee Arcadian styled,
Is faced by one who bears no braggart sign,
But his hand sees to smite, where blows avail—
Actor, own brother to Hyperbius!
He will not let a boast without a blow
Stream through our gates and nourish our despair,
Nor give him way who on his hostile shield
Bears the brute image of the loathly Sphinx!
Blocked at the gate, she will rebuke the man
Who strives to thrust her forward, when she feels
Thick crash of blows, up to the city wall.

With Heaven's goodwill, my forecast shall be true.
(ACTOR *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Home to my heart the vaunting goes,
And, quick with terror, on my head
Rises my hair, at sound of those
Who wildly, impiously rave!
If gods there be, to them I plead—
Give them to darkness and the grave.

THE SPY
Fronting the sixth gate stands another foe,
Wisest of warriors, bravest among seers—
Such must I name Amphiaraus: he,
Set steadfast at the Homoloid gate,
Berates strong Tydeus with reviling words—
The man of blood, the bane of state and home,
To Argos, arch-allurer to all ill,
Evoker of the Fury-fiend of hell,
Death's minister, and counsellor of wrong
Unto Adrastus in this fatal field.
Ay, and with eyes upturned and mien of scorn
He chides thy brother Polyneices too
At his desert, and once and yet again
Dwells hard and meaningly upon his name
Where it saith *glory* yet importeth *feud.*
Yea, such thou art in act, and such thy grace
In sight of Heaven, and such in aftertime
Thy fame, for lips and ears of mortal men!
"He strove to sack the city of his sires
And temples of her gods, and brought on her
An alien armament of foreign foes.
The fountain of maternal blood outpoured
What power can staunch? even so, thy fatherland
Once by thine ardent malice stormed and ta'en,
Shall ne'er join force with thee." For me, I know
It doth remain to let my blood enrich
The border of this land that loves me not—
Blood of a prophet, in a foreign grave!
Now, for the battle! I foreknow my doom,
Yet it shall be with honour. So he spake,
The prophet, holding up his targe of bronze
Wrought without blazon, to the ears of men

Who stood around and heeded not his word.
For on no bruit and rumour of great deeds,
But on their doing, is his spirit set,
And in his heart he reaps a furrow rich,
Wherefrom the foison of good counsel springs.
Against him, send brave heart and hand of might,
For the god-lover is man's fiercest foe.

ETEOCLES

Out on the chance that couples mortal men,
Linking the just and impious in one!
In every issue, the one curse is this—
Companionship with men of evil heart!
A baneful harvest, let none gather it!
The field of sin is rank, and brings forth death
At whiles a righteous man who goes aboard
With reckless mates, a horde of villainy,
Dies by one death with that detested crew;
At whiles the just man, joined with citizens
Ruthless to strangers, recking nought of Heaven,
Trapped, against nature, in one net with them,
Dies by God's thrust and all-including blow.
So will this prophet die, even Oecleus' child,
Sage, just, and brave, and loyal towards Heaven,
Potent in prophecy, but mated here
With men of sin, too boastful to be wise!
Long is their road, and they return no more,
And, at their taking-off, by hand of Zeus,
The prophet too shall take the downward way.
He will not—so I deem—assail the gate—
Not as through cowardice or feeble will,
But as one knowing to what end shall be
Their struggle in the battle, if indeed
Fruit of fulfilment lie in Loxias' word.
He speaketh not, unless to speak avails!
Yet, for more surety, we will post a man,
Strong Lasthenes, as warder of the gate,
Stern to the foeman; he hath age's skill,
Mated with youthful vigour, and an eye
Forward, alert; swift too his hand, to catch
The fenceless interval 'twixt shield and spear!
Yet man's good fortune lies in hand of Heaven.

(LASTHENES *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Unto our loyal cry, ye gods, give ear!
Save, save the city! turn away the spear,
Send on the foemen fear!
Outside the rampart fall they, rent and riven
Beneath the bolt of heaven!

THE SPY

Last, let me name yon seventh antagonist,
Thy brother's self, at the seventh portal set—
Hear with what wrath he imprecates our doom,
Vowing to mount the wall, though banished hence,
And peal aloud the wild exulting cry—
The town is ta'en—then clash his sword with thine,
Giving and taking death in close embrace,
Or, if thou 'scapest, flinging upon thee,
As robber of his honour and his home,
The doom of exile such as he has borne.
So clamours he and so invokes the gods
Who guard his race and home, to hear and heed
The curse that sounds in Polyneices' name!
He bears a round shield, fresh from forge and fire,
And wrought upon it is a twofold sign—
For lo, a woman leads decorously
The figure of a warrior wrought in gold;
And thus the legend runs—*I Justice am,*
And I will bring the hero home again,
To hold once more his place within this town,
Once more to pace his sire's ancestral hall.
Such are the symbols, by our foemen shown—
Now make thine own decision, whom to send
Against this last opponent! I have said—
Nor canst thou in my tidings find a flaw—
Thine is it, now, to steer the course aright.

ETEOCLES

Ah me, the madman, and the curse of Heaven!
And woe for us, the lamentable line
Of Oedipus, and woe that in this house
Our father's curse must find accomplishment!
But now, a truce to tears and loud lament,
Lest they should breed a still more rueful wail!
As for this Polyneices, named too well,
Soon shall we know how this device shall end—

Whether the gold-wrought symbols on his shield,
In their mad vaunting and bewildered pride,
Shall guide him as a victor to his home!
For had but Justice, maiden-child of Zeus,
Stood by his act and thought, it might have been!
Yet never, from the day he reached the light
Out of the darkness of his mother's womb,
Never in childhood, nor in youthful prime,
Nor when his chin was gathering its beard,
Hath Justice hailed or claimed him as her own.
Therefore I deem not that she standeth now
To aid him in this outrage on his home!
Misnamed, in truth, were Justice, utterly,
If to impiety she lent her hand.
Sure in this faith, I will myself go forth
And match me with him; who hath fairer claim?
Ruler, against one fain to snatch the rule,
Brother with brother matched, and foe with foe,
Will I confront the issue. To the wall!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O thou true heart, O child of Oedipus,
Be not, in wrath, too like the man whose name
Murmurs an evil omen! 'Tis enough
That Cadmus' clan should strive with Argos' host,
For blood there is that can atone that stain!
But—brother upon brother dealing death—
Not time itself can expiate the sin!

ETEOCLES

If man find hurt, yet clasp his honour still,
'Tis well; the dead have honour, nought beside.
Hurt, with dishonour, wins no word of praise!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, what is thy desire?
Let not the lust and ravin of the sword
Bear thee adown the tide accursed, abhorred!
Fling off thy passion's rage, thy spirit's prompting dire!

ETEOCLES

Nay—since the god is urgent for our doom,
Let Laius' house, by Phoebus loathed and scorned,
Follow the gale of destiny, and win
Its great inheritance, the gulf of hell!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ruthless thy craving is—
Craving for kindred and forbidden blood
To be outpoured—a sacrifice imbrued
With sin, a bitter fruit of murderous enmities!

ETEOCLES

Yea, my own father's fateful Curse proclaims—
A ghastly presence, and her eyes are dry—
Strike! honour is the prize, not life prolonged!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah, be not urged of her! for none shall dare
To call thee *coward,* in thy throned estate!
Will not the Fury in her sable pall
Pass outward from these halls, what time the gods
Welcome a votive offering from our hands?

ETEOCLES

The gods! long since they hold us in contempt,
Scornful of gifts thus offered by the lost!
Why should we fawn and flinch away from doom?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Now, when it stands beside thee! for its power
May, with a changing gust of milder mood,
Temper the blast that bloweth wild and rude
And frenzied, in this hour!

ETEOCLES

Ay, kindled by the curse of Oedipus—
All too prophetic, out of dreamland came
The vision, meting out our sire's estate!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Heed women's voices, though thou love them not!

ETEOCLES

Say aught that may avail, but stint thy words.

LEADER

Go not thou forth to guard the seventh gate!

ETEOCLES

Words shall not blunt the edge of my resolve.

LEADER

Yet the god loves to let the weak prevail.

ETEOCLES

That to a swordsman, is no welcome word!

LEADER

Shall thine own brother's blood be victory's palm?

ETEOCLES

Ill which the gods have sent thou canst not shun!

(ETEOCLES *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

I shudder in dread of the power, abhorred by the gods of high heaven,
The ruinous curse of the home till roof-tree and rafter be riven!
Too true are the visions of ill, too true the fulfilment they bring
To the curse that was spoken of old by the frenzy and wrath of the king!
Her will is the doom of the children, and Discord is kindled amain,

antistrophe 1

And strange is the Lord of Division, who cleaveth the birthright in twain,—
The edged thing, born of the north, the steel that is ruthless and keen,
Dividing in bitter division the lot of the children of teen!
Not the wide lowland around, the realm of their sire, shall they have,
Yet enough for the dead to inherit, the pitiful space of a grave!

strophe 2

Ah, but when kin meets kin, when sire and child,
Unknowing, are defiled
By shedding common blood, and when the pit
Of death devoureth it,
Drinking the clotted stain, the gory dye—
Who, who can purify?
Who cleanse pollution, where the ancient bane
Rises and reeks again?

antistrophe 2

Whilome in olden days the sin was wrought,
And swift requital brought—
Yea on the children of the child came still
New heritage of ill!
For thrice Apollo spoke this word divine,
From Delphi's central shrine,

To Laius—*Die thou childless! thus alone*
Can the land's weal be won!

strophe 3

But vainly with his wife's desire he strove,
And gave himself to love,
Begetting Oedipus, by whom he died,
The fateful parricide!
The sacred seed-plot, his own mother's womb,
He sowed, his house's doom,
A root of blood! by frenzy lured, they came
Unto their wedded shame.

antistrophe 3

And now the waxing surge, the wave of fate,
Rolls on them, triply great—
One billow sinks, the next towers, high and dark,
Above our city's bark—
Only the narrow barrier of the wall
Totters, as soon to fall;
And, if our chieftains in the storm go down,
What chance can save the town?

strophe 4

Curses, inherited from long ago,
Bring heavy freight of woe:
Rich stores of merchandise o'erload the deck,
Near, nearer comes the wreck—
And all is lost, cast out upon the wave,
Floating, with none to save!

antistrophe 4

Whom did the gods, whom did the chief of men,
Whom did each citizen
In crowded concourse, in such honour hold,
As Oedipus of old,
When the grim fiend, that fed on human prey,
He took from us away?

strophe 5

But when, in the fulness of days, he knew of his bridal unblest,
A twofold horror he wrought, in the frenzied despair of his breast—
Debarred from the grace of the banquet, the service of goblets of gold,
He flung on his children a curse for the splendour they dared to withhold,

antistrophe 5

A curse prophetic and bitter—*The glory of wealth and of pride,*
With iron, not gold, in your hands, ye shall come, at the last, to divide!
Behold, how a shudder runs through me, lest now, in the fulness of time,
The house-fiend awake and return, to mete out the measure of crime!
(THE SPY *enters.*)

THE SPY

Take heart, ye daughters whom your mothers' milk
Made milky-hearted! lo, our city stands,
Saved from the yoke of servitude: the vaunts
Of overweening men are silent now,
And the State sails beneath a sky serene,
Nor in the manifold and battering waves
Hath shipped a single surge, and solid stands
The rampart, and the gates are made secure,
Each with a single champion's trusty guard.
So in the main and at six gates we hold
A victory assured; but, at the seventh,
The god that on the seventh day was born,
Royal Apollo, hath ta'en up his rest
To wreak upon the sons of Oedipus
Their grandsire's wilfulness of long ago.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What further woefulness besets our home?

THE SPY

The home stands safe—but ah, the princes twain—

LEADER

Who? what of them? I am distraught with fear.

THE SPY

Hear now, and mark! the sons of Oedipus—

LEADER

Ah, my prophetic soul! I feel their doom.

THE SPY

Have done with questions!—with their lives crushed out—

LEADER

Lie they out yonder? the full horror speak!
Did hands meet hands more close than brotherly?
Came fate on each, and in the selfsame hour?

THE SPY

Yea, blotting out the lineage ill-starred!
Now mix your exultation and your tears,
Over a city saved, the while its lords,
Twin leaders of the fight, have parcelled out
With forged arbitrament of Scythian steel
The full division of their fatherland,
And, as their father's imprecation bade,
Shall have their due of land, a twofold grave.
So is the city saved; the earth has drunk
Blood of twin princes, by each other slain.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O mighty Zeus and guardian powers,
The strength and stay of Cadmus' towers!
Shall I send forth a joyous cry,
Hail to the lord of weal renewed?
Or weep the misbegotten twain,
Born to a fatal destiny
Each numbered now among the slain,
Each dying in ill fortitude,
Each *truly named,* each *child of feud?*
O dark and all-prevailing ill,
That broods o'er Oedipus and all his line,
Numbing my heart with mortal chill!
Ah me, this song of mine,
Which, Thyad-like, I woke, now falleth still,
Or only tells of doom,
And echoes round a tomb!
Dead are they, dead! in their own blood they lie—
Ill-omened the concent that hails our victory!
The curse a father on his children spake
Hath faltered not, nor failed!
Nought, Laius! thy stubborn choice availed—
First to beget, then, in the after day
And for the city's sake,
The child to slay!
For nought can blunt nor mar
The speech oracular!
Children of teen! by disbelief ye erred—
Yet in wild weeping came fulfilment of the word!

(ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE *approach, with a train of mourners, bearing the bodies of* ETEOCLES *and* POLYNEICES.)

Look up, look forth! the doom is plain,
Nor spake the messenger in vain!
A twofold sorrow, twofold strife—
Each brave against a brother's life!
In double doom hath sorrow come—
How shall I speak it?—on the home!
Alas, my sisters! be your sighs the gale,
The smiting of your brows the plash of oars,
Wafting the boat, to Acheron's dim shores
That passeth ever, with its darkened sail,
On its uncharted voyage and sunless way,
Far from thy beams, Apollo, god of day—
The melancholy bark
Bound for the common bourn, the harbour of the dark!

Look up, look yonder! from the home
Antigone, Ismene come,
On the last, saddest errand bound,
To chant a dirge of doleful sound,
With agony of equal pain
Above their brethren slain!
Their sister-bosoms surely swell,
Heart with rent heart according well
In grief for those who fought and fell!
Yet—ere they utter forth their woe—
We must awake the rueful strain
To vengeful powers, in realms below,
And mourn hell's triumph o'er the slain!

Alas! of all, the breast who bind,—
Yea, all the race of womankind—
O maidens, ye are most bereaved!
For you, for you the tear-drops start—
Deem that in truth, and undeceived,
Ye hear the sorrows of my heart!

(*To the dead*)

Children of bitterness, and sternly brave—
One, proud of heart against persuasion's voice,
One, against exile proof! ye win your choice—
Each in your fatherland, a separate grave!

Alack, on house and heritage
They brought a baneful doom, and death for wage!
One strove through tottering walls to force his way,
One claimed, in bitter arrogance, the sway,
And both alike, even now and here,
Have closed their suit, with steel for arbiter!
And lo, the Fury-fiend of Oedipus, their sire,
Hath brought his curse to consummation dire
Each in the left side smitten, see them laid—
The children of one womb,
Slain by a mutual doom!
Alas, their fate! the combat murderous,
The horror of the house,
The curse of ancient bloodshed, now repaid!
Yea, deep and to the heart the deathblow fell,
Edged by their feud ineffable—
By the grim curse, their sire did imprecate—
Discord and deadly hate!
Hark, how the city and its towers make moan—
How the land mourns that held them for its own!
Fierce greed and fell division did they blend,
Till death made end!
They strove to part the heritage in twain,
Giving to each a gain—
Yet that which struck the balance in the strife,
The arbitrating sword,
By those who loved the twain is held abhorred—
Loathed is the god of death, who sundered each from life!
Here, by the stroke of steel, behold! they lie—
And rightly may we cry
Beside their fathers, let them here be laid—
Iron gave their doom, with iron their graves be made—
Alack, the slaying sword, alack, th' entombing spade!
Alas, a piercing shriek, a rending groan,
A cry unfeigned of sorrow felt at heart!
With shuddering of grief, with tears that start,
With wailful escort, let them hither come—
For one or other make divided moan!
No light lament of pity mixed with gladness,
But with true tears, poured from the soul of sadness,
Over the princes dead and their bereavèd home
Say we, above these brethren dead,
On citizen, on foreign foe,

Brave was their rush, and stern their blow—
Now, lowly are they laid!
Beyond all women upon earth
Woe, woe for her who gave them birth!
Unknowingly, her son she wed—
The children of that marriage-bed,
Each in the self-same womb, were bred—
Each by a brother's hand lies dead!

Yea, from one seed they sprang, and by one fate
Their heritage is desolate,
The heart's division sundered claim from claim,
And, from their feud, death came!
Now is their hate allayed,
Now is their life-stream shed,
Ensanguining the earth with crimson dye—
Lo, from one blood they sprang, and in one blood they lie!
A grievous arbiter was given the twain—
The stranger from the northern main,
The sharp, dividing sword,
Fresh from the forge and fire
The War-god treacherous gave ill award
And brought their father's curse to a fulfilment dire!
They have their portion—each his lot and doom,
Given from the gods on high!
Yea, the piled wealth of fatherland, for tomb,
Shall underneath them lie!
Alas, alas! with flowers of fame and pride
Your home ye glorified;
But, in the end, the Furies gathered round
With chants of boding sound,
Shrieking, *In wild defeat and disarray,*
Behold, ye pass away!
The sign of Ruin standeth at the gate,
There, where they strove with Fate—
And the ill power beheld the brothers' fall,
And triumphed over all!

(ANTIGONE, ISMENE, *and the* CHORUS *all take part in the following responsive dirge.*)

Thou wert smitten, in smiting,
Thou didst slay, and wert slain—
By the spear of each other

Ye lie on the plain,
And ruthless the deed that ye wrought was, and ruthless the death of the twain!

Take voice, O my sorrow!
Flow tear upon tear—
Lay the slain by the slayer,
Made one on the bier!
Our soul in distraction is lost, and we mourn o'er the prey of the spear!

Ah, woe for your ending,
Unbrotherly wrought!
And woe for the issue,
The fray that ye fought,
The doom of a mutual slaughter whereby to the grave ye are brought!

Ah, twofold the sorrow—
The heard and the seen!
And double the tide
Of our tears and our teen,
As we stand by our brothers in death and wail for the love that has been!

O grievous the fate
That attends upon wrong!
Stern ghost of our sire,
Thy vengeance is long!
Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

O dark were the sorrows
That exile hath known!
He slew, but returned not
Alive to his own!
He struck down a brother, but fell, in the moment of triumph hewn down!

O lineage accurst,
O doom and despair!
Alas, for their quarrel,
The brothers that were!

And woe! for their pitiful end, who once were our love and our care!

O grievous the fate
That attends upon wrong!
Stern ghost of our sire,
Thy vengeance is long!
Dark Fury of hell and of death, the hands of thy kingdom are strong!

By proof have ye learnt it!
At once and as one,
O brothers belovèd,
To death ye were done!
Ye came to the strife of the sword, and behold! ye are both overthrown!

O grievous the tale is,
And grievous their fall,
To the house, to the land,
And to me above all!
Ah, God! for the curse that hath come, the sin and the ruin withal!

O children distraught,
Who in madness have died!
Shall ye rest with old kings
In the place of their pride?
Alas for the wrath of your sire if he findeth you laid by his side!

(*A* HERALD *enters.*)

HERALD

I bear command to tell to one and all
What hath approved itself and now is law,
Ruled by the counsellors of Cadmus' town.
For this Eteocles, it is resolved
To lay him on his earth-bed, in this soil,
Not without care and kindly sepulture.
For why? he hated those who hated us,
And, with all duties blamelessly performed
Unto the sacred ritual of his sires,
He met such end as gains our city's grace,—
With auspices that do ennoble death.

Such words I have in charge to speak of him:
But of his brother Polyneices, this—
Be he cast out unburied, for the dogs
To rend and tear: for he presumed to waste
The land of the Cadmeans, had not Heaven—
Some god of those who aid our fatherland—
Opposed his onset, by his brother's spear,
To whom, tho' dead, shall consecration come!
Against him stood this wretch, and brought a horde
Of foreign foemen, to beset our town.
He therefore shall receive his recompense,
Buried ignobly in the maw of kites—
No women-wailers to escort his corpse
Nor pile his tomb nor shrill his dirge anew—
Unhouselled, unattended, cast away!
So, for these brothers, doth our State ordain.

ANTIGONE

And I—to those who make such claims of rule
In Cadmus' town—I, though no other help,

(*Pointing to the body of* POLYNEICES)

I, I will bury this my brother's corse
And risk your wrath and what may come of it!
It shames me not to face the State, and set
Will against power, rebellion resolute:
Deep in my heart is set my sisterhood,
My common birthright with my brothers, born
All of one womb, her children who, for woe,
Brought forth sad offspring to a sire ill-starred.
Therefore, my soul! take thou thy willing share,
In aid of him who now can will no more,
Against this outrage: be a sister true,
While yet thou livest, to a brother dead!
Him never shall the wolves with ravening maw
Rend and devour: I do forbid the thought!
I for him, I—albeit a woman weak—
In place of burial-pit, will give him rest
By this protecting handful of light dust
Which, in the lap of this poor linen robe,
I bear to hallow and bestrew his corpse
With the due covering. Let none gainsay!
Courage and craft shall arm me, this to do.

HERALD
I charge thee, not to flout the city's law!

ANTIGONE
I charge thee, use no useless heralding!

HERALD
Stern is a people newly 'scaped from death.

ANTIGONE
Whet thou their sternness! burial he shall have.

HERALD
How? grace of burial, to the city's foe?

ANTIGONE
God hath not judged him separate in guilt.

HERALD
True—till he put this land in jeopardy.

ANTIGONE
His rights usurped, he answered wrong with wrong.

HERALD
Nay—but for one man's sin he smote the State.

ANTIGONE
Contention doth out-talk all other gods!
Prate thou no more—I will to bury him.

HERALD
Will, an thou wilt! but I forbid the deed.
(*The* HERALD *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Exulting Fates, who waste the line
  And whelm the house of Oedipus!
Fiends, who have slain, in wrath condign,
  The father and the children thus!
What now befits it that I do,
What meditate, what undergo?
Can I the funeral rite refrain,
Nor weep for Polyneices slain?
But yet, with fear I shrink and thrill,
Presageful of the city's will!
Thou, O Eteocles, shalt have

Full rites, and mourners at thy grave,
But he, thy brother slain, shall he,
With none to weep or cry *Alas,*
To unbefriended burial pass?
Only one sister o'er his bier,
To raise the cry and pour the tear—
Who can obey such stern decree?

SEMI-CHORUS

Let those who hold our city's sway
  Wreak, or forbear to wreak, their will
On those who cry, *Ah, well-a-day!*
  Lamenting Polyneices still!
We will go forth and, side by side
With her, due burial will provide!
Royal he was; to him be paid
Our grief, wherever he be laid!
The crowd may sway, and change, and still
Take its caprice for Justice' will!
  But we this dead Eteocles,
  As Justice wills and Right decrees,
    Will bear unto his grave!
  For—under those enthroned on high
  And Zeus' eternal royalty—
  He unto us salvation gave!
    He saved us from a foreign yoke,—
    A wild assault of outland folk,
  A savage, alien wave!

NOTE FOR THE SEVEN AGAINST THEBES

THE Theban legend is interpreted in several of its aspects by Sophocles in *Oedipus the King, Antigone,* and *Oedipus at Colonus,* and by Euripides in *The Suppliants* and *The Phoenissae.*

1. The descriptions of the decorations upon the shields reflect the literary convention found in Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, *Iliad,* XVIII, and Hesiod's *Shield of Heracles.* All these passages constitute evidence for the extent to which awareness of objects of art existed at these periods. Cf. also the opening chorus of Euripides' *Ion.*

IV
PROMETHEUS BOUND

Characters in the Play

Power
Force
Hephaestus
Prometheus
Chorus of the Daughters of Oceanus
Oceanus
Io
Hermes

INTRODUCTION

FEW Greek tragedies present as many critical difficulties as does the *Prometheus Bound*. In the first place even its authenticity has been doubted, although this view has not commanded any general acceptance. Its date is likewise uncertain. Some scholars have placed it before *The Persians*, while others have insisted that it must have been composed much later, at a time not far removed from that of the *Oresteia*. Further, although the play is presumably one part of a trilogy, critics have not been able to determine with exactness what place it occupied in the larger dramatic unit and what was the content of its companion plays. Lastly, the question of its larger significance has provided ample material for critical debate.

So far as our information goes, we may with fair assurance accept the theory, now generally held, that the *Prometheus Bound* was the first play of the trilogy, followed by *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*. In the trilogy the poet has treated in detail the legend of the great Titan, who took pity on the helplessness of men, and gave them the precious gift of fire which he stole from Heaven, wherewith they were able to improve their state and to learn the arts of civilization. Prometheus' theft contravened an ordinance of Zeus, the newly established Lord of Heaven, who had determined to destroy the race of men. Our play deals with Zeus' punishment of his rebellious subject, while the second of the series told of Prometheus' release, and the third, about which we have scarcely any knowledge, may have connected the legend with the institution of some religious festival of the Athenians.

In the *Prometheus Bound* Aeschylus was faced with a difficult problem of dramaturgy since he had to build a play in which his central character could not move, in a very literal sense of the word. Consequently the poet found himself considerably limited in scope and was forced practically to eliminate from his play anything which we might call "action." Aeschylus solves the problem by introducing several characters who in one way or another set off the central figure. He contrasts Prometheus now with Oceanus, now with Io his fellow-sufferer at the hands of Zeus, and finally with Hermes, the "lackey of Zeus" as Prometheus bitterly

calls him. In and through the dialogues between Prometheus and his various interlocutors gradually emerges the poet's analysis of the questions he is raising in the play.

Since we do not possess the rest of the trilogy, any attempt to give a general interpretation of the *Prometheus Bound* is hazardous. At least some points are certain. Here we have a play whose dramatic date lies almost at the beginning of mythological time. Furthermore, all the characters, save Io, are superhuman. Hence the poet has given the play a greater elevation than is to be found elsewhere in the extant Greek drama. Of course, he loses in "realism," but, to compensate this loss, he has put himself in a position whence he may appropriately attack the central problem which he has before him. This problem appears to be "What is the nature of the divine power which lies behind the universe? If that power is benevolent, beneficent or good, why is it that man suffers? Why is there evil in the world?" Our play seems to contain only the preliminaries to some kind of resolution of this most difficult of all philosophical and religious problems. Prometheus, the benignant, the "Suffering Servant," the benefactor of mankind, is posed against Zeus, the malignant tyrant, omnipotent, though not omniscient. A quasi-allegory or partial symbolism may be present here in this opposition between wisdom and brute force.

The critical problem still remains. How can the Zeus of the *Prometheus Bound* be reconciled with the Zeus of *The Suppliants* or the *Oresteia*? If we are justified in suggesting that the play is oriented towards the problem of evil and the nature of the power behind the universe, then the anthropomorphic aspects of Zeus and Prometheus in the play tend to diminish in importance, as well as certain accidental details of the legend. As a result, criticism which sees in Prometheus the normal "tragic hero," possessed with the "tragic flaw" of stubbornness, appears to become less relevant. How the conflict between Zeus and Prometheus was finally resolved by Aeschylus, or if he ever did resolve it in this trilogy, we probably shall never discover. Shelley has made the best-known attempt to repair the loss of the remaining plays. In any event, in the play one may well see the poet endeavouring to offer an interpretation of the divine nature which somehow is at once all-powerful and at once ultimately wise, and yet exercises control over a world in which the fact of evil is present. The play will always constitute a challenge to the critical imagination. The conclusion of the *Oresteia,* which deals with essentially the same religious and philosophical problem, may contain a clue to the enigma of the *Prometheus Bound.*

PROMETHEUS BOUND

(SCENE:—*A rocky gorge in Scythia.* POWER *and* FORCE *enter, carrying* PROMETHEUS *as a captive. They are accompanied by* HEPHAESTUS.)

POWER

To THIS far region of the earth, this pathless wilderness of Scythia, at last we are come. O Hephaestus, thine is the charge, on thee are laid the Father's commands in never-yielding fetters linked of adamant to bind this miscreant to the high-ridged rocks. For this is he who stole the flame of all-working fire, thy own bright flower, and gave to mortal men. Now for the evil done he pays this forfeit to the gods; so haply he shall learn some patience with the reign of Zeus and put away his love for human kind.

HEPHAESTUS

O Power and Force, your share in the command of Zeus is done, and for you nothing remains; but I—some part of courage still is wanting to bind with force a kindred god to this winter-bitten gorge. Yet must I summon daring to my heart, such dread dwells in the Father's word.—(*to* PROMETHEUS) O high magnanimous son of prudent Themis, against thy will and mine with brazen bonds no hand can loose I bind thee to this unvisited lonely rock. No human voice will reach thee here, nor any form of man be seen. Parched by the blazing fires of the sun thy skin shall change its pleasant hue; grateful to thee the starry-kirtled night shall come veiling the day, and grateful again the sun dispelling the morn's white frost. Forever the weariness of unremitting pain shall waste thy strength, for he is not born who can deliver thee. See now the profit of thy human charity: thou, a god not fearing the wrath of the gods, hast given to mortal men honors beyond their due; and therefore on this joyless rock thou must keep vigil, sleepless and weary-clinging, with unbended knees, pouring out thy ceaseless lamentations and unheeded cries; for the mind of Zeus knows no turning, and ever harsh the hand that newly grasps the sway.

POWER

It may be so, yet why seek delay in vainly spent pity? Feel you no hatred for this enemy of the gods, who hath betrayed to mortals your own chief honor?

HEPHAESTUS

Kinship and old fellowship will have their due.

POWER

'Tis true; but where is strength to disobey the father's words? Fearest thou not rather this?

HEPHAESTUS

Ever merciless thou art, and steeped in cruelty.

POWER

It healeth nothing to weep for him. Take not up an idle burden wherein there is no profit.

HEPHAESTUS

Alas, my cherished craft, thrice hateful now!

POWER

Why hateful? In simple sooth thy art hath no blame for these present ills.

HEPHAESTUS

Yet would it were another's, not mine!

POWER

All toil alike in sorrow, unless one were lord of heaven; none is truly free, save only Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

This task confirms it; I can nothing deny.

POWER

Make haste then to bind him in fetters, lest the father detect thee loitering.

HEPHAESTUS

Behold the curb; it is ready to hand.

POWER

Strongly with thy hammer, strongly weld it about his hands; make him fast to the rock.

HEPHAESTUS

The work goes on, it is well done.

POWER

Harder strike them, tighter draw the links, leave nothing loose; strange skill he hath to find a way where none appeared.

HEPHAESTUS

One arm is fastened, and none may loose it.

POWER

Fetter the other, make it sure; he shall learn how all his cunning is folly before Zeus.

HEPHAESTUS

Save now my art hath never wrought harm to any.

POWER

Now strongly drive the biting tooth of the adamantine wedge straight through his breast.

HEPHAESTUS

Alas, Prometheus! I groan for thy pangs.

POWER

Dost thou shrink? Wilt thou groan for the foes of Zeus? Take heed, lest thou groan for thyself.

HEPHAESTUS

Thou lookest upon a spectacle grievous to the eye.

POWER

I look upon one suffering as he deserves.—Now about his sides strain tight the girth.

HEPHAESTUS

It must needs be done; yet urge me not overmuch.

POWER

Yet will I urge and harry thee on.—Now lower; with force constrain his legs.

HEPHAESTUS

'Tis even done; nor was the labor long.

POWER

Weld fast the galling fetters; remember that he who appraises is strict to exact.

HEPHAESTUS

Cruel thy tongue, and like thy cruel face.

POWER

Be thine the tender heart! Rebuke not my bolder mood, nor chide my austerity.

HEPHAESTUS

Let us go; now the clinging web binds all his limbs.

(HEPHAESTUS *departs.*)

POWER

There, wanton, in thy insolence! Now for thy creatures of a day filch divine honors. Tell me, will mortal men drain for thee these tortures? Falsely the gods call thee Prometheus, the Contriver, for no cunning contrivance shall help thee to slip from this bondage.

(POWER *and* FORCE *depart.*)

PROMETHEUS (*alone, chanting*)

O air divine, and O swift-wingèd winds!
Ye river fountains, and thou myriad-twinkling
Laughter of ocean waves! O mother earth!
And thou, O all-discerning orb o' the sun!—
To you, I cry to you; behold what I,
A god, endure of evil from the gods.

Behold, with what dread torments
I through the slow-revolving
Ages of time must wrestle;
Such hideous bonds the new lord
Of heaven hath found for my torture.
Woe! woe! for the present disasters
I groan, and for those that shall come;
Nor know I in what far sky
The dawn of deliverance shall rise.

Yet what is this I say? All future things
I see unerring, nor shall any chance
Of evil overtake me unaware.
The will of Destiny we should endure
Lightly as may be, knowing still how vain
To take up arms against Necessity.
Silent I cannot keep, I cannot tongue
These strange calamities. Lo, I am he

Who, darkly hiding in a fennel reed
Fountains of fire, so secretly purloined
And gave to be the teacher of all arts
And giver of all good to mortal men.
And now this forfeit for my sin I pay,
Thus lodged in fetters under the bare sky.

Woe's me!
What murmur hovereth near?
What odor, where visible shape
Is none? Some god, or a mortal,
Or one of the middle race?
Hath he come to this world's-end
Idly to gloat o'er my toils,
Or what would he have?—Behold me
Fettered, the god ill-fated,
The foeman of Zeus, the detested
Of all who enter his courts,
And only because of my love,
My too-great love for mankind.
Ah me! once more the murmur
I hear as of hovering birds;
And the air is whirring with quick
Beating of wings. For me
There is fear, whatever approaches.
(*The* CHORUS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF OCEANUS *enter, drawn in a winged car.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Fear nothing; in friendship and eager
With wingèd contention of speed
Together we draw near thy rock.
Scarce we persuaded our father,
But now at last the swift breezes
Have brought us. Down in the depth
Of our sea-cave came the loud noise
Of the welding of iron; and wonderment
Banished our maiden shame;
All in haste, unsandalled, hither
We flew in this wingèd car.

PROMETHEUS

Ah me! ah me!
O all ye children of Tethys,
Daughters of father Oceanus
Who ever with tide unwearied
Revolveth the whole world round,—
Behold now prisoned in chains
On the dizzy verge of this gorge
Forever I keep sad watch.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

I see, O Prometheus, thy body
In the toils and torture of bondage
Withering here on this rock;
And a mist as of terror, a cloud
Of tears o'erveils my eyes:
New helmsmen guide in the heavens,
And Zeus unlawfully rules
With new laws, and the might of old
He hath banished to uttermost darkness.

PROMETHEUS

Would that me too he had hurled,
Bound in these cruel, unyielding
Bonds, down, down under earth,
Beneath wide Hades, where go
The tribe of innumerable dead,
Down to the infinite depths
Of Tartarus! There no god,
No mortal would gloat o'er my ruin.
Now like a toy of the winds
I hang, my anguish a joy
To my foes.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Who of the gods is so hardened?
To whom is thy sorrow a joy?
Who save only Zeus
But feels the pang of thy torments?
But he, ever savage of soul,
Swayeth the children of heaven;
Nor ever will cease till his heart

Is satiate grown, or another
Snatches the empire by guile.

PROMETHEUS

Ay, and this Lord of the blessed
Shall call in the fulness of time
Upon me whom he tortures in bondage,
Shall implore me to utter the plot
That will rob him of honour and throne.
No sweet-lipped charm of persuasion
Then shall allure me, and never
In cringing fear of his threats
The knowledge will I impart,
Till first he has loosened these bonds,
And for all my anguish he too
Hath humbled his neck unto judgment.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Bold art thou, and calamity
Softens thee not, but ever
Thy thought is quick on thy tongue.
Terror pierceth my heart,
And fearing I ask what shore,
O wanderer tempest-tost,
Far-off of peace shall receive thee!
Stern is the son of Cronos,
And deaf his heart to beseeching.

PROMETHEUS

I know of his hardness, I know
That justice he holds in his palm;
Yet his pride shall be humbled, I think;
His hardness made soft, and his wrath
Shall bow to the blows of adversity;
He, too, in milder mood
Shall come, imploring of me
The friendship I willingly grant.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unfold to us the whole story. For what crime does Zeus so shamefully and bitterly torture you? Tell us, if there is no harm in telling.

PROMETHEUS

Painful are these things to relate, painful is silence, and all is wretchedness. When first the gods knew wrath, and faction raised its head amongst them, and some would tear old Cronos from his throne that Zeus might take his place, and others were determined that Zeus should never reign over the gods, then I with wise counsel sought to guide the Titans, children of Earth and Sky,—but all in vain. My crafty schemes they disdained, and in their pride of strength thought it were easy to make themselves lords by force. Often to me my mother Themis (or call her Earth, for many names she hath, being one) had foretold in oracles what was to be, with warning that not by might or brutal force should victory come, but by guile alone. So I counselled them, but they turned their eyes from me in impatience. Of the courses which then lay open, far the best, it seemed, was to take my mother as my helper and to join my will with the will of Zeus. By my advice the cavernous gloom of Tartarus now hides in night old Cronos and his peers. Thus the new tyrant of heaven took profit of me, and thus rewards me with these torments. 'Tis the disease of tyranny, no more, to take no heed of friendship. You ask why he tortures me; hear now the reason. No sooner was he established on his father's throne than he began to award various offices to the different gods, ordering his government throughout. Yet no care was in his heart for miserable men, and he was fain to blot out the whole race and in their stead create another. None save me opposed his purpose; I only dared; I rescued mankind from the heavy blow that was to cast them into Hades. Therefore I am bowed down by this anguish, painful to endure, pitiable to behold. Mercy I had for mortals, but found no mercy for myself: so piteously I am disciplined, an ignoble spectacle for Zeus.

LEADER

Fashioned of rock is he, and iron is his heart, O Prometheus, who feels not indignation at thy disasters. Rather would I not have seen them at all, and seeing them I am sore of heart.

PROMETHEUS

To my very friends I am a spectacle of pity.

LEADER

Yet it may be—did thy transgressions end there?

PROMETHEUS

Through me mankind ceased to foresee death.

LEADER

What remedy could heal that sad disease?

PROMETHEUS

Blind hopes I made to dwell in them.

LEADER

O merciful boon for mortals.

PROMETHEUS

And more than all I gave them fire.

LEADER

And so in their brief life they are lords of flaming fire?

PROMETHEUS

Through it they will learn many arts.

LEADER

And was it for crimes like this Zeus—

PROMETHEUS

Tortures me, and ceases not nor relents.

LEADER

And is there no goal to the struggle before thee?

PROMETHEUS

There is none, save when it seems to him good.

LEADER

When shall it so seem? What hope? Seest thou not thy error? That thou hast erred, I say in sorrow and with sorrow to thee. But enough of that; seek thou some release from the conflict.

PROMETHEUS

How easy for one who fares in pleasant ways to admonish those in adversity. But all this I knew; with open eyes, with willing mind, I erred; I do not deny it. Mankind I helped, but could not help myself. Yet I dreamed not that here in this savage solitary gorge, on this high rock, I should waste away beneath such torments. Yet care not to bewail these present disasters; but descend to the earth, and hear of the woes to come and all that is to be. I pray you heed my word; have compassion on one who is now caught in the toils; for sorrow flitteth now to one and now to another, and visiteth each in his turn.

CHORUS (*singing*)

We list to your words, O Prometheus.—
Lo, with light foot I step
From the swift-rushing car; the pure air,

The highway I leave of the birds;
And now to the rugged earth
I descend. I listen, I wait
For thy story of pain and disaster.
(OCEANUS *enters, borne on a winged horse.*)

OCEANUS

To thee I come, O Prometheus;
Borne on this swift-wingèd bird
That knoweth the will of his rider
And needeth no curb, from afar
I have flown a wearisome way,
Weary but ended at last.
I am grieved with thy grief; I am drawn
By our kinship, and even without it
Thee more than all others I honor.
I speak simple sooth, and my tongue
Knows not to flatter in idleness.
Nay, tell me what aid I may render;
For never thy lips shall avow
Oceanus failed thee in friendship.

PROMETHEUS

Ho! What is this I look upon? What then, art thou too come to stare upon my ruin? What new daring has brought thee from thy ocean stream and thy rock-roofed unbuilded caverns hither to our earth, the mother of iron? Art thou come to view my fate with indignation for my calamities? Behold the spectacle! behold me, the friend of Zeus, who helped him to a throne, now bowed down by his torments.

OCEANUS

I see, Prometheus; and, though thou art thyself cunning in device, I would admonish thee to prudence. Learn to know thyself, put on the habit of new ways, for there is a new tyrant among the gods. If still thou hurlest forth these harsh and biting words, perchance from afar off, Zeus, sitting above, may hear thee, and thy present burden of sorrows will seem as the sport of children. But, O wretched sufferer, put away thy moody wrath, and seek some respite from thy ills. My advice may sound as the trite sayings of old, yet thou thyself canst see what are the wages of too bold a tongue. Thou hast not learned humility, nor to yield to evils, but rather wouldst add others new to thy present store. Take me for thy teacher, and kick not against the pricks, for there rules in heaven an austere monarch who is responsible to none. Now I will go and make trial to win thy release from this grievous state. Do thou keep thy peace,

and restrain thy blustering speech. Or knowest thou not in thy wisdom what penalties overtake an idle tongue?

PROMETHEUS

I give you joy that, having shared and dared with me, you have still kept yourself free of blame. I bid you trouble not your peace; his will is immutable and you cannot persuade him. Even beware, lest by your going you bring sorrow upon yourself.

OCEANUS

Thou art wiser to think for others than for thyself, and this I infer from the events. But deter me not from going, for I boast, yes, I may boast, that Zeus will grant me this boon and deliver thee from these toils.

PROMETHEUS

I thank you with gratitude that shall never fail, for you lack nothing in zeal. But trouble not yourself; it is idle, and your care will avail me nothing, despite your zeal. Hold your peace, and keep your foot well from these snares. If I suffer, let me suffer alone. Yet not alone, for I am burdened by the fate of Atlas, my brother. He in the far western ways stands bearing on his shoulders the mighty pillar of earth and sky, a weary burden to hold. And I have seen with pity the earth-born dweller of the Cilician caves, the impetuous, the hundred-headed Typho, when he was bent by force. For he withstood the host of the gods, hissing forth terror from his horrid throats, whilst Gorgonian fires flamed from his eyes, as if to take by violence the very throne of Zeus; but the unsleeping weapon of Zeus fell upon him, the down-rushing thunderbolt with breath of flame, and smote him from his loud-vaunted boastings; and stricken to the heart he was scorched to embers, and thunder rent from him his strength. Now a helpless sprawling bulk he lies near the ocean strait, buried beneath the roots of Aetna; whilst above on the utmost summit Hephaestus welds the molten ore. Thence some day, I ween, shall burst forth rivers of fire to devour with savage maw the wide fields of fair-fruited Sicily,—such wrath shall Typho, scorched by the thunder of Zeus, send up, a tempest, terrible, seething, with breath of flame.—But thou art not untried, and needest not me for a teacher. Save thyself, as thou best knowest how; and leave me to drain this flood of calamity, till the mind of Zeus grows light of its anger.

OCEANUS

Knowest thou not, Prometheus, there are words of healing for a mind distempered?

PROMETHEUS

Ay, if in good time we soothe the heart, nor violently repress its tumid rage.

OCEANUS

In prudent zeal and daring combined, tell me what peril hidden lies.

PROMETHEUS

Labor in vain and vain simplicity.

OCEANUS

Leave me, I prythee, to my mind's disease; for it is well having wisdom not to appear wise.

PROMETHEUS

The folly of thy mission will seem mine.

OCEANUS

It is clear your words dismiss me home.

PROMETHEUS

Your tears for me might win hatred for yourself.

OCEANUS

His hatred you mean, who newly wears the sovereignty?

PROMETHEUS

Ay, his; beware that you vex not his heart.

OCEANUS

Your calamity, Prometheus, is my teacher.

PROMETHEUS

Be gone, take yourself off, keep your present mind.

OCEANUS

I am gone even with your urgent words. See, the winged beast flutters the broad path of the air; gladly would he bend the weary knee in his stall at home.

(OCEANUS *departs as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

I mourn, O Prometheus, for thee,
I wail for thy hapless fate;
And tears in a melting flood
Flow down from the fount of my eyes,

Drenching my cheeks. O insolent
Laws, O sceptre of Zeus,
How over the gods of old
Ye wield despotic might!

antistrophe 1

Lo, all the land groans aloud;
And the people that dwell in the West
Lament for thy time-honored reign
And the sway of thy kindred, Prometheus;
And they who have builded their homes
In holy Asia to the wail
Of thine anguish lament.

strophe 2

And they
Of the Colchian land, the virgins
Exulting in war; and the Scythians
By the far Maeotian Lake
In the uttermost regions of earth;

antistrophe 2

And the martial flower of Arabia,
Whose battle resounds with the crashing
Of brazen spears, they too
In their citadel reared aloft
Near Caucasus groan for thy fate.

epode

One other, a Titan god,
I have seen in his anguish,
Atlas, the mighty one, bound
In chains adamantine, who still
With groaning upholds on his back
The high-arched vault of the skies.

epode

While ever the surge of the sea
Moans to the sound of his cry,
And the depths of its waters lament;
The fountains of hallowed rivers
Sigh for his anguish in pity;
While from its dark abyss
The unseen world far below
Mutters and rumbles in concert.

PROMETHEUS

Think not I am silent through pride or insolence; dumb rage gnaws at my very heart for this outrage upon me. Yet who but I established these new gods in their honours? But I speak not of this, for already you are aware of the truth. Rather listen to the sad story of mankind, who like children lived until I gave them understanding and a portion of reason; yet not in disparagement of men I speak, but meaning to set forth the greatness of my charity. For seeing they saw not, and hearing they understood not, but like as shapes in a dream they wrought all the days of their life in confusion. No houses of brick raised in the warmth of the sun they had, nor fabrics of wood, but like the little ants they dwelt underground in the sunless depth of caverns. No certain sign of approaching winter they knew, no harbinger of flowering spring or fruitful summer; ever they labored at random, till I taught them to discern the seasons by the rising and the obscure setting of the stars. Numbers I invented for them, the chiefest of all discoveries; I taught them the grouping of letters, to be a memorial and record of the past, the mistress of the arts and mother of the Muses. I first brought under the yoke beasts of burden, who by draft and carrying relieved men of their hardest labors; I yoked the proud horse to the chariot, teaching him obedience to the reins, to be the adornment of wealth and luxury. I too contrived for sailors sea-faring vessels with their flaxen wings. Alas for me! such inventions I devised for mankind, but for myself I have no cunning to escape disaster.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Sorrow and humiliation are your portion: you have failed in understanding and gone astray; and like a poor physician falling into sickness you despond and know not the remedies for your own disease.

PROMETHEUS

Hear but the rest, and you will wonder more at my inventions and many arts. If sickness visited them, they had no healing drug, no salve or soothing potion, but wasted away for want of remedies, and this was my greatest boon; for I revealed to them the mingling of bland medicaments for the banishing of all diseases. And many modes of divination I appointed: from dreams I first taught them to judge what should befall in waking state; I found the subtle interpretation of words half heard or heard by chance, and of meetings by the way; and the flight of taloned birds with their promise of fortune or failure I clearly denoted, their various modes of life, their mutual feuds, their friendships and consortings; I taught men to observe the smooth plumpness of entrails, and the color of the gall pleasing to the gods, and the mottled symmetry of liver-lobe. Burning the thigh-bones wrapt in fat and the long chine, I guided mankind to a hidden art, and read to them the intimations of the altar-flames

that before were meaningless. So much then for these inventions. And the secret treasures of the earth, all benefits to men, copper, iron, silver, gold,—who but I could boast their discovery? No one, I ween, unless in idle vaunting. Nay, hear the whole matter in a word,—all human arts are from Prometheus.

LEADER

Care not for mortals overmuch, whilst you neglect your own profit. Indeed, I am of good hope that yet some day, freed from bondage, you shall equal the might of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

Not yet hath all-ordaining Destiny decreed my release; but after many years, broken by a world of disaster and woe, I shall be delivered. The craft of the forger is weaker far than Necessity.

LEADER

Who then holds the helm of Necessity?

PROMETHEUS

The Fates triform and the unforgetting Furies.

LEADER

And Zeus, is he less in power than these?

PROMETHEUS

He may not avoid what is destined.

LEADER

What is destined for Zeus but endless rule?

PROMETHEUS

Ask not, neither set thy heart on knowing.

LEADER

Some solemn secret thou wouldst clothe in mystery.

PROMETHEUS

Speak no more of it; the time is not yet to divulge it, and the secret must still be deeply shrouded. Harbouring this I shall one day escape from this outrage and ignominy of bondage.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

May never Zeus, the all-wielder,
Against my feeble will

Set his strength; nor ever may I
By the stanchless flood of my father,
By the shores of Oceanus, cease
With hallowed offering of oxen
To worship the gods. May never
My tongue give offence, but always
This purpose abide in my soul.

antistrophe 1

Ah, sweet to prolong our days
In the courage of hope, and sweet
With ever dawning delights
To nourish the heart. I shudder,
Prometheus, for thee, for thy weight
Of myriad-pilèd woe;
Ay, fearing not Zeus, in self-will
Too much thou honourest mortals;

strophe 2

For thankless thy favor, O friend:
And where is the valour, what help
From men who appear and are gone?
Their weakness hast thou not discovered,
Their feeble blindness wherein
Like dreaming shadows they move?
Never their counsels shall break
Through the harmony ordered of Zeus.

antistrophe 2

I too have pondered this wisdom,
Beholding thy terrible ruin,
Prometheus. Ah me, for the change!
With what other notes I chanted
Thy bridal song, the shrill
Hymenean strains at the bath
And the couch, on the happy day
When our sister Hesione, won
By thy bounty, entered thy home!

(Io *enters, transformed in part to a heifer, followed by the Spectre of* Argus. *She is in a half-frenzied state.*)

Io (*chanting*)
What land have I reached? what people?
Who is this I behold in chains

On this storm-riven rock? What crime
Hath brought thee to perishing thus?
Ah whither, to what far regions
Hath misery borne me? Ah me!
Once more I am stung by the gadfly,
Pursued by the wraith of dead Argus.
Save me, O Earth! Once more
In my terror I see him, the watcher;
He is there, and his myriad eyes
Are upon me. Shall earth nevermore
Conceal her buried dead?
He hath come from the pit to pursue me,
He drives me weary and famished
Over the long sea sands;
And ever his shrill scrannel pipe,
Waxen-jointed, is droning forth
A slumberous strain.

Alas!
To what land far-off have I wandered?
What error, O Zeus, what crime
Is mine that thus I am yoked
Unto misery? Why am I stung
With frenzy that drives me unresting
Forever? Let fires consume me;
Let the deep earth yawning engulf me;
Or the monstrous brood of the sea
Devour; but O great King,
Hark to my pleading for respite!
I have wandered enough, I am weary,
And still I discern no repose.—
(*To* PROMETHEUS)
And thou, hast thou heard me, the virgin
Wearing these horns of a heifer?

PROMETHEUS
I hear the frenzied child of Inachus,
The maiden who with love could all inflame
Great Zeus's heart, and now by Hera's hate
Forever flees before this stinging pest.

Io (*chanting*)
Thou knowest my father then?
And who, I prythee, art thou

That callest me thus by name,
Oh name most wretched! and tellest
The wasting plague heaven-sent
And the pest with its haunting sting?
Ah me! behold I am come
With leapings of madness, by hunger
And craving impelled, and subdued
By the crafty anger of Hera.
Who in this world of calamity,
Who suffers as I?—But thou,
If thou canst, declare what awaits me
Of sorrow; what healing balm
I may find. Speak thou, I implore thee,
I, the wandering virgin of sorrows.

PROMETHEUS

Clearly I will set forth all you would learn; speaking not in dark riddles, but in full simplicity, as speech is due between friends. Behold, I whom you see am Prometheus, the giver of fire to mankind.

IO

You who appeared to men with all-sufficient bounty,—tell me why are you, O enduring Prometheus, given over to chastisement?

PROMETHEUS

But now I have ceased bewailing these calamities.

IO

And will you deny me this simple boon?

PROMETHEUS

What do you ask? You may learn all from me.

IO

Declare who chained you to this rocky gorge.

PROMETHEUS

The will of Zeus, but Hephaestus' hand.

IO

For what crimes are you punished thus?

PROMETHEUS

I have told you enough; ask no more.

Io

One further boon: what term shall end my wanderings? what time is ordained for my peace?

Prometheus

Better for you not to know than to know.

Io

Yet hide not what remains for me to endure.

Prometheus

So much alone I am willing to grant.

Io

Why then do you delay? I would know all.

Prometheus

It is not churlishness; I am loth to bruise your heart.

Io

Spare me not further than I myself desire.

Prometheus

Since you so crave, it is well; hear me then.

Leader of the Chorus

Nay, not yet. Grant me also a share in your grace. Let us first hear from her the story of her sorrow and the disasters that prey on her life. Then do you declare to her what struggle still remains.

Prometheus

'Tis for thee, Io, to bestow this favor; and fittingly, for these are thy father's sisters. Time is not lost, I deem, in bewailing and mourning our fate when answering tears stand ready in the listener's eye.

Io

Hard would it be to disregard your wish;
And if my words have credit in your ears
The tale is rendered. Yet as one who speaks
And still laments, my sorrows I recount,—
How wild, perturbing wonders in my soul
Wrought by the will of heaven, and how in shape
This bestial transformation I endured.
For always in the drowsy hours of night
I, sleeping in my virgin chambers, saw
Strange visitations pass, and as they passed

Each smiled and whispered: O sweet-favored girl,
Why cherish long thy maiden loneliness,
When love celestial calleth? Fair art thou,
And thronèd Zeus, heart-smitten with desire,
Yearns from his heaven to woo thee. Nay, sweet child,
Disdain him not. Now to the meadow land
Of Lerna, where thy father's pastures lie
And the sleek cattle browse, do thou steal forth
Alone, and haply there thy yielding grace
May soothe the passion in the Sovereign's eye.—
Such dreams, filling with fear the hours of sleep,
Drove me at last to tell my father all.
And he was troubled; many times in doubt
To Pythian Delphi and the speaking oaks
Of far Dodona messengers he sent,
Inquiring by what act or pleasing word
The grace of heaven to win. But ever these
With oracles of shifting speech returned,
Inexplicably dark. Yet in the end
Came one clear cruel utterance, oh, too clear!
That bade him drive me forth from home and land,
An exile doomed in solitary ways
To wander to the confines of the world.
With such commands came words of dreadful import,
And threats of flaming thunderbolts from Zeus
With burning wrath to desolate his race,
If he durst disobey. Much doubted he,
But at the last Apollo's warning voice
And Zeus's curb upon his soul prevailed:
He drave me forth, and all my life's young joy
Ended in bitter grief for him and me.
Straightway my form this strange distortion knew,
With horns here on my front; and madly stung
By this insatiate fly, with antic bounds
I sped away to the sweet-flowing fount
Of Cenchreae and the Lernéan well;
While close upon me Argus, born of earth,
Savage and sleepless trailed, his wakeful eyes
Fixed on my track. And though a sudden fate
Him overmastered, yet this stinging fly
Still with his lash pursues from land to land.—
Such is my tale; and now if in thy wit
It lies to prophesy what toils remain,

So say, nor by false pitying speech misguide;
For glozing words I deem the worst disease.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh strange! Oh, more than incredible!
Never I thought such words
Surpassing the wildest belief
Should enter my ears, such a tale
Of horror and woe and calamity.
I am stung to the soul, and compassion
Benumbs my heart. O Fate!
Alas, O Fate! I shudder
Beholding the lot of this maiden.

PROMETHEUS

You are quick to lament and very prone to fear. Yet wait a little till you have heard what remains.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Speak, tell us all; to the sick it is sweet to know betimes what awaits them of pain.

PROMETHEUS

Lightly I granted your former request, for you desired first to hear from her lips the story of her conflict; hear now the evils that Hera hath still in store for this maiden;—and do you, O daughter of Inachus, take my words to your heart that you may know the goal of your wanderings. —Turn first toward the rising sun, and thitherward proceeding over unploughed fields you will reach the nomad Scythians, a people of mighty archers, who in their wicker-woven houses dwell aloft on smooth-rolling wagons. Approach not these, but pass on through the land, keeping ever near to the surf-beaten shores of the Euxine. To the left dwell the Chalybes, famous workers of iron; and of them you must beware, for they are a savage race and regard not strangers. Then will you come to the River of Violence, fierce as its name and treacherous to ford; cross not over it until you have reached the Caucasus, highest of mountains, where the river pours out its fury over the brows of the cliffs. Here over the star-neighboring summits you must toil and turn to the southern path: so in time you will reach the host of the Amazons, ever hostile to men, who one day shall inhabit Themiscyra on the Thermodon, where Salmydessus opens upon the sea her ravenous jaws, a terror to strange sailors, a cruel step-dame to ships. Gladly the Amazons will guide thee on thy way. And thou wilt come to the Cimmerian isthmus by the narrow gateway of the lake; and leaving this with brave heart thou wilt cross over the Maeotic

strait, which ever after in memorial of thy crossing men shall call the Bosporus, the fording of the heifer. Thus thou wilt abandon the plain of Europe and venture on the continent of Asia.—Now doth not the tyrant of the gods seem to you altogether violent? Behold how this god, desiring to mingle with a mortal woman, hath imposed on her these wanderings.—Thou hast met, O maiden, a bitter claimant for thy favor; and the words thou hast heard are not even the prelude to what must follow.

Io

Alas, for me!

Prometheus

Once more you cry out and groan; what will you do when you have learned the troubles that remain?

Leader

Nay, have you calamities still to recount?

Prometheus

As it were a stormy sea of lamentable woe.

Io

What profit have I in life? Why do I not hurl myself out of hand from this rude precipice, that broken on the plain below I may have speedy respite from my troubles? It were better to die once for all than to drag out my lingering days in anguish.

Prometheus

How hardly would you endure my struggles, for death that would release me from my woes is denied me by Destiny. Now there is no goal before me of my conflict until Zeus is thrown from his supremacy.

Io

And shall Zeus ever fall from power?

Prometheus

You would rejoice, I think, to see his overthrow.

Io

Why should I not, who am abused by Zeus?

Prometheus

You may learn from me that your wish is truth.

Io

Who shall despoil him of the tyrant's sceptre?

PROMETHEUS
He shall himself despoil by his own folly.

Io
How may it be? Speak, if there is no harm.

PROMETHEUS
An ill-fated espousal shall work him grief.

Io
A spouse divine or human? tell if thou mayst.

PROMETHEUS
What is it to thee? I may not speak her name.

Io
His bride shall drag him from the throne?

PROMETHEUS
A son she shall bear, mightier than his father.[1]

Io
Hath he no refuge from this doom?

PROMETHEUS
There is none, except I be loosed from my bonds.

Io
Who is to loose thee against the will of Zeus?

PROMETHEUS
Thy own children's child must do the deed.[2]

Io
What sayest thou? my son shall end thy evils?

PROMETHEUS
The third after the tenth generation.

Io
Thy oracle is dark to my understanding.

PROMETHEUS
Pass it by; thy own ill fate is involved therein.

Io
The boon is offered, and straightway thou withdrawest it.

PROMETHEUS

I grant thee the knowledge of either of two desires

IO

Tell me the twain, and let me choose.

PROMETHEUS

'Tis done; choose whether I tell thee plainly of thy coming tribulations or of him who is to deliver me.

LEADER

Yet rather bestow the one favor on her and the other on me, and be not chary of your words. To her set forth her future wanderings, and to me your deliverer, as I long to hear.

PROMETHEUS

Your eagerness compels me, and I will relate all you ask. To you first, Io, I will proclaim trials of wandering, and do you record them on the tablets of your brain.—When [3] you have crossed the tide that bounds two continents, then toward the flaming sun-trodden regions of the dawn pass on beyond the surge of the sea till you reach the Gorgonean plains of Cisthene, the home of the Graeae, the three daughters of Phorcys, ancient virgins, possessing among them but one eye and one tooth, upon whom neither the sun looks down with his beams, nor ever the moon by night. And near by are the three other sisters, the winged, snake-haired, man-hating Gorgons, upon whom no mortal may look and live. Such wardens guard that land. Yet hear another spectacle of dread: beware the sharp-beaked hounds of Zeus that never bark, the griffins, and beware the one-eyed Arimaspian host of riders who dwell by the gold-washing tide of Pluto's stream; approach them not. And you will come to a far-off land, a swarthy people, who live by the fountain of the sun and Aethiopia's river. Follow its banks until you arrive at the Cataract where from the Bybline hills the Nile pours out its waters sweet and worshipful. This stream will guide you to the great Nilotic delta, where at the last fate bids you and your children, Io, establish your far-off home. Now if my speech seems stammering and hard to understand, still question me and be advised; for there is more leisure to me than I could wish.

CHORUS

If anything remains untold of her life of weary wanderings, now recount it to her, but if all is said, then grant us the favor we beg. You have not forgotten it.

PROMETHEUS

She has heard her journeyings to the end; yet that she may know my words are not spoken in vain, I will relate her toils before coming hither, and this shall be a witness to the truth of my prophecy. I will pass over the greater part of the tale, and come to the end of your wanderings. For thus you came at last to the Molossian plains and Dodona with its lofty ridges, where is the oracle and home of Thesprotian Zeus and that strange portent of the talking oaks which in language clear and void of riddles addressed you as the renowned future spouse of Zeus, and the memory of this must still speak in your breast. From thence, urged on by frenzy, you rushed by the sea-shore path to the great gulf of Rhea, and back returned like a vessel tempest-tost from port. Now no longer the gulf shall be known by its old name, but shall be called the Ionian Sea, as a memorial to all men of your journeying. This knowledge is a sign to you of my understanding, that it discerns more than meets the eye.—The rest I tell to you, daughters of Oceanus, and to her together, returning again to the track of my former tale. There is a city, Canobus, standing on the verge of the land at the very mouth and silted bar of the Nile, where at the last Zeus shall restore you to your mind with but the stroke and gentle touching of his hand. There you shall bear a child to Zeus, the swarthy Epaphus, "Touch-born," who shall gather as lord the fruit of all the valley of the broad-flowing Nile. The fourth generation after him,[4] a band of fifty sisters shall return perforce to Argos, to flee the courtship of their fifty cousins. And these, like hawks that follow hard upon a flock of doves, shall pursue the maidens, seeking marriage ill to seek, for God shall grudge them the sweet pleasure of that love. In the Pelasgian land the maidens shall find a home, when in the watches of the night with deed of murderous revenge they, women as they are, have slain their suitors, each plunging her deadly blade into her new lord's throat—so might the Queen of Love appear to my foes! Yet longing shall soothe one maiden's heart to spare her fellow, and blunt the edge of her resolve, for of the twain it will please her rather to be called timid than bloodthirsty. And from her a royal race shall spring in Argos—time fails to tell the whole—and a mighty man of valor, renowned with the bow, who shall deliver me from these toils. All this my ancient mother, the Titan Themis, foretold to me in an oracle; but how it shall come to pass needs yet many words to relate, and the hearing would profit you nothing.

IO (*chanting*)

Eleleu! eleleu!
Once more the spasm, the madness
Smiteth my brain as a fire.
I am stung by the pest, I am pierced

With a dart never forged in the fire;
My seated heart at my ribs
Doth knock, and my straining eyes
Revolve in their orbs; I am borne
As a vessel is lashed by the tempest;
My tongue hath broke its control,
And my turbid words beat madly
In billows of horror and woe.

(Io *departs, as the* Chorus *begins its song.*)

Chorus

strophe

Wise among mortals I count him
Who weighed this truth in his mind
And divulged it: better the union
Of equal with equal in wedlock.
How shall the toiler, the craftsman,
Be lifted in idle desire
To mate with the glory of wealth
Or the honor of noble descent?

antistrophe

Never, O kindly powers,
Behold me the partner of Zeus;
Never may one of the gods
Descend from the skies for my love.
Horror sufficient I feel
For Io, the virgin, the outcast,
Who hateth her lord and is driven
By Hera to wander forlorn.

epode

Wedlock if equal I fear not;
But oh! may never a god
With love's irresistible glance
Constrain me! Hard were the battle,
For who were I to resist him?
What way of escape would remain
From the counsel and purpose of Zeus?

Prometheus

Yet shall Zeus himself, the stubborn of soul, be humbled, for the union he purposes in his heart shall hurl him to outer darkness from his throne of supremacy. Then at last the curse of his father Cronos shall be ful-

filled to the uttermost, the curse that he swore when thrown from his ancient seat. All this I know and how the curse shall work, and I only of the gods may point out a refuge from these disasters. Therefore let him sit boldly now, trusting in his thunders that reverberate through the sky, and wielding fiery darts in his hands; they shall avail him naught nor save him from falling in ruin unendurable. A mighty wrestler he is preparing against himself, an irresistible champion, who shall search out a fire more terrible than his lightning and a roaring noise to drown his thunder, and who shall break in pieces that sea-scourge and shaker of the earth, the trident-spear of Poseidon. And Zeus, broken on this rock, shall learn how far apart it is to rule and be a slave.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thy bodings against Zeus are but thy own desire.

PROMETHEUS

I speak what is to be, and that is my desire.

LEADER

Must we look for one to reign above Zeus?

PROMETHEUS

Troubles more grievous to bear shall bow his neck.

LEADER

Thou tremblest not to utter such words?

PROMETHEUS

Why should I tremble whose fate is not to die?

LEADER

Yet he might still harder torments inflict.

PROMETHEUS

So let him; I am prepared for all.

LEADER

Yet the wise bow down to Nemesis.

PROMETHEUS

So worship, flatter, adore the ruler of the day; but I have no thought in my heart for Zeus. Let him act, let him reign his little while as he will; for he shall not long rule over the gods.—(HERMES *enters.*) But I see here the lackey of Zeus, the servant of the new tyrant. No doubt he has come with tidings of some new device.

HERMES

Thee, the wise, the bitter beyond bitterness, the thief of fire, who hast revolted against the gods and betrayed their honours to thy creatures of a day,—to thee I speak. The father bids thee declare the chance of wedlock thou vauntest, that shall bereave him of his sceptre; and this thou art to state clearly and not involve thy speech in riddles. Put me not, O Prometheus, to double my journey; thou seest that Zeus is not appeased by dubious words.

PROMETHEUS

Haughty thy speech and swollen with pride, as becomes a servant of the gods. Ye are but young in tyranny, and think to inhabit a citadel unassaulted of grief; yet have I not seen two tyrants fall therefrom? And third I shall behold this present lord cast down in utter ruin. Do I seem to cower and quail before these new gods? Hardly, I think; there is no fear in me. But do you trudge back the road you came; for all your pains of asking are in vain.

HERMES

Yet forget not such insolence has brought you to this pass of evil.

PROMETHEUS

Be assured I would not barter my hard lot for your menial service.

HERMES

It is better no doubt to serve this rock than to be the trusted herald of Zeus.

PROMETHEUS

I but answered insult with insult.

HERMES

You seem to glory in your present state.

PROMETHEUS

What, I? So might I see my enemies glory,—and you among them!

HERMES

You blame me too for your calamities?

PROMETHEUS

In simple sooth I count all the gods my foes, who requited my benefits with injuries.

HERMES

Your madness I see is a deep-rooted disease.

PROMETHEUS

If hatred of foes is madness, I am mad.

HERMES

Who could endure you in prosperity!

PROMETHEUS

Alas, prosperity!

HERMES

Zeus has not learned that cry, alas.

PROMETHEUS

Time, growing ever older, teaches all things.

HERMES

It has not taught you wisdom yet.

PROMETHEUS

Else I should hardly talk with you, a slave.

HERMES

It seems you will not answer the father's demands.

PROMETHEUS

My debt of gratitude I fain would pay.

HERMES

You have reviled and scorned me as a child.

PROMETHEUS (*in supreme anger*)

And are you not simpler than a child if you hope to learn aught from me? There is no torment or contrivance in the power of Zeus to wring this utterance from me, except these bonds are loosened. Therefore let him hurl upon me the red levin, let him confound the reeling world with tempest of white-feathered snow and subterranean thunders; none of these things shall extort from me the knowledge that may ward off his overthrow.

HERMES

Consider if you shall profit by this.

PROMETHEUS

I have considered long since and formed my plan.

HERMES

Yet subdue thyself in time, rash fool, to regard thy present ills in wisdom.[5]

PROMETHEUS

You vex me to no purpose, as one might waste his words on a wave of the sea. Dream not that ever in fear of Zeus's will I shall grow woman-hearted, and raise my supine hands in supplication to my hated foe for deliverance from these bonds;—it is not in my nature.

HERMES

Though I speak much, my words will all be wasted; my appeals have no power to soften and appease your heart, but champing the bit like a new-yoked colt you are restive and struggle against the reins. There is no strength of wisdom in your savage mood, for mere self-will in a foolish man avails nothing. And consider, if thou disregard my words, what a tempest of evils, wave on wave inevitable, shall break upon thee; for first the father will smite this rugged cliff with rending of thunder and hurtling fires, and in its harsh and rock-ribbed embrace enfold thy hidden body. Then after a weary age of years once more thou shalt come forth to the light; and the winged hound of Zeus, the ravening eagle, with savage greed shall tear the mighty ruin of thy limbs, feasting all day an uninvited guest, and glutting his maw on thy black-gnawed liver. Neither look for any respite from this agony, unless some god shall appear as a voluntary successor to thy toils, and of his own free will goeth down to sunless Hades and the dark depths of Tartarus. Therefore take heed; for my words are not vain boasting, but all too truly spoken. The lips of Zeus know not to utter falsehood, but all that he saith he will accomplish. Do thou consider and reflect, and regard not vaunting pride as better than wise counsel.

LEADER

To us Hermes seems to utter words not untimely; for he admonishes you to abandon vaunting pride and seek for wise counsel. Obey him; it is shameful for a wise man to go astray.

PROMETHEUS (*chanting*)

All this ere he uttered his message
I knew; yet feel no dishonor
In suffering wrong from a foe.
Ay, let the lightning be launched
With curled and forkèd flame
On my head; let the air confounded
Shudder with thunderous peals
And convulsion of raging winds;
Let tempests beat on the earth
Till her rooted foundations tremble;
The boisterous surge of the sea

Leap up to mingle its crest
With the stars eclipsed in their orbs;
Let the whirling blasts of Necessity
Seize on my body and hurl it
Down to the darkness of Tartarus,—
Yet all he shall not destroy me!

HERMES

I hear the delirious cries
Of a mind unhinged; his prayer
Is frenzy, and all that he doth.—
But ye who condole with his anguish,
Be quick, I implore, and depart,
Ere the deafening roar of the thunder
Daze and bewilder your senses.

CHORUS

Waste not thy breath in vain warnings,
Nor utter a word unendurable;
For who art thou in the pathway
Of evil and falsehood to guide me?
Better I deem it to suffer
Whate'er he endures; for traitors
My soul abhorreth, their shame
I spew from my heart as a pest.

HERMES

Yet remember my counsel in season,
And blame not your fortune when caught
In the snare of Disaster, nor cry
Unto Zeus that he throws you unwarned
Into sorrow. Yourselves take the blame;
Foretaught and with eyes unveiled
You walk to be snared in the vast
And implicate net of Disaster.

(HERMES *goes out. A storm bursts, with thunder and lightning. The rocks are sundered;* PROMETHEUS *slowly sinks from sight, while the* CHORUS *scatters to right and left.*)

PROMETHEUS

Lo, in grim earnest the world
Is shaken, the roar of thunders
Reverberates, gleams the red levin,

And whirlwinds lick up the dust.
All the blasts of the winds leap out
And meet in tumultuous conflict,
Confounding the sea and the heavens.
'Tis Zeus who driveth his furies
To smite me with terror and madness.
O mother Earth all-honored,
O Air revolving thy light
A common boon unto all,
Behold what wrongs I endure.

NOTES FOR PROMETHEUS BOUND

THE translation of Paul Elmer More, author of the *Shelburne Essays* and *The Greek Tradition,* was first published in 1899. The present text contains corrections and revisions made by the translator in his own personal copy which was turned over to the editors. More's scheme of translation, which is similar in some respects to that of Richard Aldington in his version of Euripides' *Alcestis,* and to that of R. C. Trevelyan in his version of Sophocles' *Ajax,* may perhaps best be described in a short quotation from his introduction. In speaking of the Chorus, More says: "Their song and the lyric parts throughout I have turned into semi-poetic language to mark them off to the eye at least from the regular dialogue, which in the original is in a metre akin to our blank verse and is here translated into prose." Certain choral passages in Greek tragedy rendered into short lines of English verse, skilfully composed, seem to preserve with peculiar effectiveness the austerity and dignity of the original.

1. The reference is to the son which Thetis will bear if she consummates her marriage with Zeus. This secret knowledge constitutes Prometheus' only defence against Zeus.

2. This refers to Heracles.

3. The highly imaginative geography of the following speeches evidently afforded great pleasure to the Greek audiences.

4. For the story of the Danaids, cf. Aeschylus, *The Suppliants,* and its introduction.

5. Hermes here virtually identifies wisdom with prudent self-interest.

V

AGAMEMNON

Characters in the Play

A Watchman
Chorus of Argive Elders
Clytemnestra, *wife of* Agamemnon
A Herald
Agamemnon, *King of Argos*
Cassandra, *daughter of Priam, and slave of* Agamemnon
Aegisthus, *son of Thyestes, cousin of* Agamemnon
Servants, Attendants, Soldiers

INTRODUCTION

The trilogy *Oresteia:* *Agamemnon, The Choephori,* and *The Eumenides*

THE only trilogy in Greek tragedy which has come down to us complete is the so-called *Oresteia,* made up of the three plays, *Agamemnon, The Choephori,* and *The Eumenides.* Each individual play therefore must be regarded as a single large act of the whole tragedy. The trilogy is in all probability the last work which Aeschylus composed, and won the first prize in the tragic contest held in 458 B.C. There can be little question that it is Aeschylus' masterpiece and it deservedly holds its position at the forefront of Greek tragedy along with the great Oedipus plays of Sophocles.

In the *Oresteia* Aeschylus studies again a curse upon a house. This time he turns to the legends of the House of Atreus which told how Atreus and Thyestes, sons of Pelops, became enemies, how Thyestes wronged Atreus' wife, how Atreus in revenge slew Thyestes' children, and served them to him in a ghastly banquet. The curse came into being as a result of these horrible crimes. Such was the inheritance of Agamemnon and Menelaus, the sons of Atreus. However, all went well with them until Helen, the wife of Menelaus, and reputedly the fairest of women in the world, deserted her husband to go with Paris to Troy. Then, at his brother's request, Agamemnon, the most powerful king in all Greece, marshalled a great Grecian host to invade the Troad and to regain Helen. The expedition assembled at Aulis, but the hostility of Artemis caused contrary winds to blow, and dissension and discontent arose among the Greeks, who were impatient to depart. Calchas, the seer to whom an appeal was made, announced that the expedition could sail only on condition that Agamemnon appease the wrath of Artemis by sacrificing his daughter, Iphigenia. Agamemnon, after a period of inner struggle, finally gave way, the maiden was sacrificed, and the host embarked. After ten years Troy fell, and the various Greek leaders began their journeys home.

The *Agamemnon* opens at this point. The scene is laid at Argos, where

the queen, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife, has not yet heard that the Greeks have captured Troy. Clytemnestra, in the king's absence and in anger at the loss of her daughter, Iphigenia, has taken as her lover, Aegisthus, Thyestes' sole surviving son, who is burning with a desire to revenge himself upon Agamemnon. The queen and her paramour have carefully laid a plot to murder the king upon his return. The events in the first play of the trilogy are the arrival of the news of Troy's capture, Agamemnon's homecoming and his subsequent murder. The second play, *The Choephori,* tells how Electra and Orestes, daughter and son of Agamemnon, slew their mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover, to avenge their father's death. The third play, *The Eumenides,* records how Orestes, driven by the Furies, who are quasi-symbols of conscience, ultimately was absolved of his guilt, and how the curse finally ceased to operate.

The *Agamemnon,* taken by itself, contains two or three aspects worthy of special consideration. The first is the masterly fashion in which Aeschylus has drawn the character of Clytemnestra. With sure hand, he reveals the tense psychological strain under which she is labouring, her adamantine calm as she first greets her husband, her wild triumph after the murder, when she glories in her deed, and her final exhausted reaction at the close of the play. Secondly, Agamemnon's entrance provides a scene which illustrates better than any other in Greek tragedy how a playwright can exploit the possibilities of "spectacle," to use Aristotle's designation in his *Poetics* for this aspect of tragedy. Not only is Agamemnon's triumphal entry at the head of a great procession spectacular, but likewise the appeal is to the eye when at the centre of the scene is spread a carpet of deep crimson (or "purple," as it is translated by Morshead), upon which Agamemnon is to walk to his doom. Aeschylus has here used color symbolically with great effect. And finally, the so-called Cassandra scene is perhaps as intense dramatically as any in the literature of the theatre. As Agamemnon's concubine and his chief spoil of the war, Cassandra follows him on the scene, remains motionless and silent until finally, after Agamemnon and Clytemnestra have entered the palace, she breaks into her half-crazed lament and prophecy, which none can believe. The variation in cadence and emotional tension of her lines in the scene account largely for its effectiveness.

The Choephori takes its name from the Chorus of "Libation-Bearers" who have accompanied Electra to the tomb of Agamemnon in the opening scene. Considered by itself the play gains added interest for students of Greek tragedy because both Sophocles in his *Electra* and Euripides in his *Electra* have dealt with the same subject-matter. Particularly noteworthy in the play is the long *commos* or lyric passage sung by Electra, Orestes, and the Chorus during which the will of Orestes is steeled for the act of slaying his mother. Equally effective is Orestes' final speech

during which the Furies first appear to him and the fabric of his reason begins to give way.

Viewed as a self-contained dramatic unit, *The Eumenides,* so called from the designation given to the Chorus after they have been transformed into Goddesses of Grace, has one individual feature worthy of mention. This is the scene in which Orestes is put on trial for his matricide. Athena creates a court of Athenians who will be competent to judge not only Orestes but also all similar offenders in the future. In this way Aeschylus accounts for the origin of the much-revered Athenian court of the Areopagus. Such ventures in aetiology undoubtedly had a popular appeal for the Athenian audience, and served to make more immediate a drama so largely devoted to mythological or legendary material.

The points already touched upon have not been directly involved with the central import of the trilogy as a whole. It has already been stated that Aeschylus is studying the phenomenon of an ancestral curse. Here is the House of Atreus. Atreus and Thyestes sin. Agamemnon sins in his turn. He is murdered, and his murder begets another. When will the chain of crime cease? It seems undeniable that Aeschylus is focussing his attention upon this aspect of the problem of evil. Furthermore, Aeschylus attacks the question from the point of view of a monotheistic theology. The great opening choral ode of the *Agamemnon* makes this fact abundantly clear. A lofty theological tone is set for the whole trilogy, when the poet writes, p. 172,

> Zeus—if to the Unknown
> That name of many names seem good—
> Zeus, upon thee I call.
> Thro' the mind's every road
> I passed, but vain are all,
> Save that which names thee Zeus, the Highest One,
> Were it but mine to cast away the load,
> The weary load, that weighs my spirit down.
> . . . . . .
> 'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way
> Of knowledge: He hath ruled,
> Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

God has ruled that man shall learn by suffering, such is the initial interpretation of the problem offered by Aeschylus at the outset of his drama. The tone continues in the other choral passages of the *Agamemnon,* though the interpretation tends to verge upon the theory that God's justice and his punishments are based upon the principle of "an eye for an eye." But in *The Eumenides* Orestes is acquitted and not for very

logically convincing reasons, and with him justice seems to have been tempered with mercy. Orestes leaves the scene almost immediately, but the play continues, and it is in this closing passage that Aeschylus gives the final resolution to his problem. There are no human characters left, which suggests the idea that Aeschylus has used his human story merely to provide illustrative material for his analysis of the central issue. The Furies, who in their choral songs throughout the play have expressed themselves as uncompromising instruments of Fate and of divine vengeance—"an eye for an eye"—are won over by Athena, and mysteriously and mystically become Goddesses of Mercy. Aeschylus' resolution then is mystical and in a strange sense supra-rational. Its power is like in kind to and of the same order as that in the *Book of Job* when the Voice from the Whirlwind speaks. At the end of the *Oresteia* Aeschylus gives us a conception of a godhead which is at once merciful and just, in which both "Zeus" and "Fate" are fused, through whose wisdom man by suffering can achieve wisdom.[1]

[1] A. W. Verrall in the introduction to his text of *The Eumenides* has developed at some length this interpretation of the play's conclusion.

AGAMEMNON

(SCENE:—*Before the palace of* AGAMEMNON *in Argos. In front of the palace there are statues of the gods, and altars prepared for sacrifice. It is night. On the roof of the palace can be discerned a* WATCHMAN.)

WATCHMAN

I PRAY the gods to quit me of my toils,
To close the watch I keep, this livelong year;
For as a watch-dog lying, not at rest,
Propped on one arm, upon the palace-roof
Of Atreus' race, too long, too well I know
The starry conclave of the midnight sky,
Too well, the splendours of the firmament,
The lords of light, whose kingly aspect shows—
What time they set or climb the sky in turn—
The year's divisions, bringing frost or fire.

And now, as ever, am I set to mark
When shall stream up the glow of signal-flame,
The bale-fire bright, and tell its Trojan tale—
Troy town is ta'en: such issue holds in hope
She in whose woman's breast beats heart of man.[1]

Thus upon mine unrestful couch I lie,
Bathed with the dews of night, unvisited
By dreams—ah me!—for in the place of sleep
Stands Fear as my familiar, and repels
The soft repose that would mine eyelids seal.

And if at whiles, for the lost balm of sleep,
I medicine my soul with melody
Of trill or song—anon to tears I turn,
Wailing the woe that broods upon this home,
Not now by honour guided as of old.

But now at last fair fall the welcome hour
That sets me free, whene'er the thick night glow
With beacon-fire of hope deferred no more.
All hail!
(*A beacon-light is seen reddening the distant sky.*)
Fire of the night, that brings my spirit day,
Shedding on Argos light, and dance, and song,
Greetings to fortune, hail!

Let my loud summons ring within the ears
Of Agamemnon's queen, that she anon
Start from her couch and with a shrill voice cry
A joyous welcome to the beacon-blaze,
For Ilion's fall; such fiery message gleams
From yon high flame; and I, before the rest,
Will foot the lightsome measure of our joy;
For I can say, *My master's dice fell fair—*
Behold! the triple sice, the lucky flame!
Now be my lot to clasp, in loyal love,
The hand of him restored, who rules our home:
Home—but I say no more: upon my tongue
Treads hard the ox o' the adage.[2]
Had it voice,
The home itself might soothliest tell its tale;
I, of set will, speak words the wise may learn,
To others, nought remember nor discern.
(*He withdraws. The* CHORUS OF ARGIVE ELDERS *enters, each leaning on a staff. During their song* CLYTEMNESTRA *appears in the background, kindling the altars.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Ten livelong years have rolled away,
Since the twin lords of sceptred sway,
By Zeus endowed with pride of place,
The doughty chiefs of Atreus' race,
Went forth of yore,
To plead with Priam, face to face,
Before the judgment-seat of War!

A thousand ships from Argive land
Put forth to bear the martial band,
That with a spirit stern and strong

Went out to right the kingdom's wrong—
Pealed, as they went, the battle-song,
  Wild as the vultures' cry;
When o'er the eyrie, soaring high,
In wild bereavèd agony,
Around, around, in airy rings,
They wheel with oarage of their wings,
But not the eyas-brood behold,
That called them to the nest of old;
But let Apollo from the sky,
Or Pan, or Zeus, but hear the cry,
The exile cry, the wail forlorn,
Of birds from whom their home is torn—
On those who wrought the rapine fell,
Heaven sends the vengeful fiends of hell.

Even so doth Zeus, the jealous lord
And guardian of the hearth and board,
Speed Atreus' sons, in vengeful ire,
'Gainst Paris—sends them forth on fire,
Her to buy back, in war and blood,
Whom one did wed but many woo'd!
And many, many, by his will,
The last embrace of foes shall feel,
And many a knee in dust be bowed,
And splintered spears on shields ring loud,
Of Trojan and of Greek, before
That iron bridal-feast be o'er!
But as he willed 'tis ordered all,
And woes, by heaven ordained, must fall—
Unsoothed by tears or spilth of wine
Poured forth too late, the wrath divine
Glares vengeance on the flameless shrine.

And we in grey dishonoured eld,
Feeble of frame, unfit were held
To join the warrior array
That then went forth unto the fray:
And here at home we tarry, fain
Our feeble footsteps to sustain,
Each on his staff—so strength doth wane,
And turns to childishness again.
For while the sap of youth is green,

And, yet unripened, leaps within,
The young are weakly as the old,
And each alike unmeet to hold
The vantage post of war!
And ah! when flower and fruit are o'er,
And on life's tree the leaves are sere,
Age wendeth propped its journey drear,
As forceless as a child, as light
And fleeting as a dream of night
Lost in the garish day!
But thou, O child of Tyndareus,
Queen Clytemnestra, speak! and say
What messenger of joy to-day
Hath won thine ear? what welcome news,
That thus in sacrificial wise
E'en to the city's boundaries
Thou biddest altar-fires arise?
Each god who doth our city guard,
And keeps o'er Argos watch and ward
From heaven above, from earth below—
The mighty lords who rule the skies,
The market's lesser deities,
To each and all the altars glow,
Piled for the sacrifice!
And here and there, anear, afar,
Streams skyward many a beacon-star,
Conjur'd and charm'd and kindled well
By pure oil's soft and guileless spell,
Hid now no more
Within the palace' secret store.

O queen, we pray thee, whatsoe'er,
Known unto thee, were well revealed,
That thou wilt trust it to our ear,
And bid our anxious heart be healed!
That waneth now unto despair—
Now, waxing to a presage fair,
Dawns, from the altar, Hope—to scare
From our rent hearts the vulture Care.

strophe 1

List! for the power is mine, to chant on high
The chiefs' emprise, the strength that omens gave!

List! on my soul breathes yet a harmony,
From realms of ageless powers, and strong to save!

How brother kings, twin lords of one command,
Led forth the youth of Hellas in their flower,
Urged on their way, with vengeful spear and brand,
By warrior-birds, that watched the parting hour.

Go forth to Troy, the eagles seemed to cry—
And the sea-kings obeyed the sky-kings' word,
When on the right they soared across the sky,
And one was black, one bore a white tail barred.

High o'er the palace were they seen to soar,
Then lit in sight of all, and rent and tare,
Far from the fields that she should range no more,
Big with her unborn brood, a mother-hare.

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

antistrophe 1

And one beheld, the soldier-prophet true,
And the two chiefs, unlike of soul and will,
In the twy-coloured eagles straight he knew,
And spake the omen forth, for good and ill.

Go forth, he cried, *and Priam's town shall fall.*
Yet long the time shall be; and flock and herd,
The people's wealth, that roam before the wall,
Shall force hew down, when Fate shall give the word.

But O beware! lest wrath in Heaven abide,
To dim the glowing battle-forge once more,
And mar the mighty curb of Trojan pride,
The steel of vengeance, welded as for war!

For virgin Artemis bears jealous hate
Against the royal house, the eagle-pair,
Who rend the unborn brood, insatiate—
Yea, loathes their banquet on the quivering hare.

(Ah woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

epode

For well she loves—the goddess kind and mild—
The tender new-born cubs of lions bold,
Too weak to range—and well the sucking child
Of every beast that roams by wood and wold.

So to the Lord of Heaven she prayeth still,
"Nay, if it must be, be the omen true!
Yet do the visioned eagles presage ill;
The end be well, but crossed with evil too!"

Healer Apollo! be her wrath controll'd,
Nor weave the long delay of thwarting gales,
To war against the Danaans and withhold
From the free ocean-waves their eager sails!

She craves, alas! to see a second life
Shed forth, a curst unhallowed sacrifice—
'Twixt wedded souls, artificer of strife,
And hate that knows not fear, and fell device.

At home there tarries like a lurking snake,
Biding its time, a wrath unreconciled,
A wily watcher, passionate to slake,
In blood, resentment for a murdered child.

Such was the mighty warning, pealed of yore—
Amid good tidings, such the word of fear,
What time the fateful eagles hovered o'er
The kings, and Calchas read the omen clear.

(In strains like his, once more,
Sing woe and well-a-day! but be the issue fair!)

strophe 2

Zeus—if to The Unknown
That name of many names seem good—
Zeus, upon Thee I call.
Thro' the mind's every road
I passed, but vain are all,
Save that which names thee Zeus, the Highest One,
Were it but mine to cast away the load,
The weary load, that weighs my spirit down.

antistrophe 2

He that was Lord of old,
In full-blown pride of place and valour bold,
Hath fallen and is gone, even as an old tale told!
And he that next held sway,
By stronger grasp o'erthrown
Hath pass'd away! [3]
And whoso now shall bid the triumph-chant arise
To Zeus, and Zeus alone,
He shall be found the truly wise.

strophe 3

'Tis Zeus alone who shows the perfect way
Of knowledge: He hath ruled,
Men shall learn wisdom, by affliction schooled.

In visions of the night, like dropping rain,
Descend the many memories of pain
Before the spirit's sight: through tears and dole
Comes wisdom o'er the unwilling soul—
A boon, I wot, of all Divinity,
That holds its sacred throne in strength, above the sky!

antistrophe 3

And then the elder chief, at whose command
The fleet of Greece was manned,
Cast on the seer no word of hate,
But veered before the sudden breath of Fate—

Ah, weary while! for, ere they put forth sail,
Did every store, each minish'd vessel, fail,
While all the Achaean host
At Aulis anchored lay,
Looking across to Chalcis and the coast
Where refluent waters welter, rock, and sway;

strophe 4

And rife with ill delay
From northern Strymon blew the thwarting blast—
Mother of famine fell,
That holds men wand'ring still
Far from the haven where they fain would be!—
And pitiless did waste
Each ship and cable, rotting on the sea,

And, doubling with delay each weary hour,
Withered with hope deferred th' Achaeans' warlike flower.

But when, for bitter storm, a deadlier relief,
And heavier with ill to either chief,
Pleading the ire of Artemis, the seer avowed,
The two Atreidae smote their sceptres on the plain,
And, striving hard, could not their tears restrain!

antistrophe 4

And then the elder monarch spake aloud—
Ill lot were mine, to disobey!
And ill, to smite my child, my household's love and pride!
To stain with virgin blood a father's hands, and slay
My daughter, by the altar's side!
'Twixt woe and woe I dwell—
I dare not like a recreant fly,
And leave the league of ships, and fail each true ally;
For rightfully they crave, with eager fiery mind,
The virgin's blood, shed forth to lull the adverse wind—
God send the deed be well!

strophe 5

Thus on his neck he took
Fate's hard compelling yoke;
Then, in the counter-gale of will abhorr'd, accursed,
To recklessness his shifting spirit veered—
Alas! that Frenzy, first of ills and worst,
With evil craft men's souls to sin hath ever stirred!

And so he steeled his heart—ah, well-a-day—
Aiding a war for one false woman's sake,
His child to slay,
And with her spilt blood make
An offering, to speed the ships upon their way!

antistrophe 5

Lusting for war, the bloody arbiters
Closed heart and ears, and would nor hear nor heed
The girl-voice plead,
Pity me, Father! nor her prayers,
Nor tender, virgin years.

So, when the chant of sacrifice was done,
Her father bade the youthful priestly train
Raise her, like some poor kid, above the altar-stone,
From where amid her robes she lay
Sunk all in swoon away—
Bade them, as with the bit that mutely tames the steed,
Her fair lips' speech refrain,
Lest she should speak a curse on Atreus' home and seed,

strophe 6

So, trailing on the earth her robe of saffron dye,
With one last piteous dart from her beseeching eye
Those that should smite she smote—
Fair, silent, as a pictur'd form, but fain
To plead, *Is all forgot?*
How oft those halls of old,
Wherein my sire high feast did hold,
Rang to the virginal soft strain,
When I, a stainless child,
Sang from pure lips and undefiled,
Sang of my sire, and all
His honoured life, and how on him should fall
Heaven's highest gift and gain!

antistrophe 6

And then—but I beheld not, nor can tell,
What further fate befel:
But this is sure, that Calchas' boding strain
Can ne'er be void or vain.
This wage from Justice' hand do sufferers earn,
The future to discern:
And yet—farewell, O secret of To-morrow!
Fore-knowledge is fore-sorrow.
Clear with the clear beams of the morrow's sun,
The future presseth on.
Now, let the house's tale, how dark soe'er,
Find yet an issue fair!—
So prays the loyal, solitary band
That guards the Apian land.

(*They turn to* CLYTEMNESTRA, *who leaves the altars and comes forward.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O queen, I come in reverence of thy sway—
For, while the ruler's kingly seat is void,
The loyal heart before his consort bends.
Now—be it sure and certain news of good,
Or the fair tidings of a flatt'ring hope,
That bids thee spread the light from shrine to shrine,
I, fain to hear, yet grudge not if thou hide.

CLYTEMNESTRA

As saith the adage, *From the womb of Night*
Spring forth, with promise fair, the young child Light.
Ay—fairer even than all hope my news—
By Grecian hands is Priam's city ta'en!

LEADER

What say'st thou? doubtful heart makes treach'rous ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear then again, and plainly—Troy is ours!

LEADER

Thrills thro' my heart such joy as wakens tears.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ay, thro' those tears thine eye looks loyalty.

LEADER

But hast thou proof, to make assurance sure?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Go to; I have—unless the god has lied.

LEADER

Hath some night-vision won thee to belief?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Out on all presage of a slumb'rous soul!

LEADER

But wert thou cheered by Rumour's wingless word?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Peace—thou dost chide me as a credulous girl.

LEADER

Say then, how long ago the city fell?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Even in this night that now brings forth the dawn.

LEADER

Yet who so swift could speed the message here?

CLYTEMNESTRA

From Ida's top Hephaestus, lord of fire,[4]
Sent forth his sign; and on, and ever on,
Beacon to beacon sped the courier-flame.
From Ida to the crag, that Hermes loves,
Of Lemnos; thence unto the steep sublime
Of Athos, throne of Zeus, the broad blaze flared.
Thence, raised aloft to shoot across the sea,
The moving light, rejoicing in its strength,
Sped from the pyre of pine, and urged its way,
In golden glory, like some strange new sun,
Onward, and reached Macistus' watching heights.
There, with no dull delay nor heedless sleep,
The watcher sped the tidings on in turn,
Until the guard upon Messapius' peak
Saw the far flame gleam on Euripus' tide,
And from the high-piled heap of withered furze
Lit the new sign and bade the message on.
Then the strong light, far-flown and yet undimmed,
Shot thro' the sky above Asopus' plain,
Bright as the moon, and on Cithaeron's crag
Aroused another watch of flying fire.
And there the sentinels no whit disowned,
But sent redoubled on, the hest of flame—
Swift shot the light, above Gorgopis' bay,
To Aegiplanctus' mount, and bade the peak
Fail not the onward ordinance of fire.
And like a long beard streaming in the wind,
Full-fed with fuel, roared and rose the blaze,
And onward flaring, gleamed above the cape,
Beneath which shimmers the Saronic bay,
And thence leapt light unto Arachne's peak,
The mountain watch that looks upon our town.
Thence to th' Atreides' roof—in lineage fair,
A bright posterity of Ida's fire.
So sped from stage to stage, fulfilled in turn,
Flame after flame, along the course ordained,

And lo! the last to speed upon its way
Sights the end first, and glows unto the goal.
And Troy is ta'en, and by this sign my lord
Tells me the tale, and ye have learned my word.

LEADER

To heaven, O queen, will I upraise new song:
But, wouldst thou speak once more, I fain would hear
From first to last the marvel of the tale.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Think you—this very morn—the Greeks in Troy,
And loud therein the voice of utter wail!
Within one cup pour vinegar and oil,
And look! unblent, unreconciled, they war.
So in the twofold issue of the strife
Mingle the victor's shout, the captives' moan.
For all the conquered whom the sword has spared
Cling weeping—some unto a brother slain,
Some childlike to a nursing father's form,
And wail the loved and lost, the while their neck
Bows down already 'neath the captive's chain.
And lo! the victors, now the fight is done,
Goaded by restless hunger, far and wide
Range all disordered thro' the town, to snatch
Such victual and such rest as chance may give
Within the captive halls that once were Troy—
Joyful to rid them of the frost and dew,
Wherein they couched upon the plain of old—
Joyful to sleep the gracious night all through,
Unsummoned of the watching sentinel.
Yet let them reverence well the city's gods,
The lords of Troy, tho' fallen, and her shrines;
So shall the spoilers not in turn be spoiled.
Yea, let no craving for forbidden gain
Bid conquerors yield before the darts of greed.
For we need yet, before the race be won,
Homewards, unharmed, to round the course once more.
For should the host wax wanton ere it come,
Then, tho' the sudden blow of fate be spared,
Yet in the sight of gods shall rise once more
The great wrong of the slain, to claim revenge.
Now, hearing from this woman's mouth of mine,
The tale and eke its warning, pray with me,

Luck sway the scale, with no uncertain poise,
For my fair hopes are changed to fairer joys.

LEADER

A gracious word thy woman's lips have told,
Worthy a wise man's utterance, O my queen;
Now with clear trust in thy convincing tale
I set me to salute the gods with song,
Who bring us bliss to counterpoise our pain.
(CLYTEMNESTRA *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Zeus, Lord of heaven! and welcome night
Of victory, that hast our might
With all the glories crowned!
On towers of Ilion, free no more,
Hast flung the mighty mesh of war,
And closely girt them round,
Till neither warrior may 'scape,
Nor stripling lightly overleap
The trammels as they close, and close,
Till with the grip of doom our foes
In slavery's coil are bound!

Zeus, Lord of hospitality,
In grateful awe I bend to thee—
'Tis thou hast struck the blow!
At Alexander, long ago,
We marked thee bend thy vengeful bow,
But long and warily withhold
The eager shaft, which, uncontrolled
And loosed too soon or launched too high,
Had wandered bloodless through the sky.

strophe 1

Zeus, the high God!—whate'er be dim in doubt,
This can our thought track out—
The blow that fells the sinner is of God,
And as he wills, the rod
Of vengeance smiteth sore. One said of old,
The gods list not to hold
A reckoning with him whose feet oppress
The grace of holiness—
An impious word! for whenso'er the sire

Breathed forth rebellious fire—
What time his household overflowed the measure
Of bliss and health and treasure—
His children's children read the reckoning plain,
At last, in tears and pain.
On me let weal that brings no woe be sent,
And therewithal, content!
Who spurns the shrine of Right, nor wealth nor power
Shall be to him a tower,
To guard him from the gulf: there lies his lot,
Where all things are forgot.

antistrophe 1

Lust drives him on—lust, desperate and wild,
Fate's sin-contriving child—
And cure is none; beyond concealment clear,
Kindles sin's baleful glare.
As an ill coin beneath the wearing touch
Betrays by stain and smutch
Its metal false—such is the sinful wight.
Before, on pinions light,
Fair Pleasure flits, and lures him childlike on,
While home and kin make moan
Beneath the grinding burden of his crime;
Till, in the end of time,
Cast down of heaven, he pours forth fruitless prayer
To powers that will not hear.

And such did Paris come
Unto Atreides' home,
And thence, with sin and shame his welcome to repay,
Ravished the wife away—

strophe 2

And she, unto her country and her kin
Leaving the clash of shields and spears and arming ships,
And bearing unto Troy destruction for a dower,
And overbold in sin,
Went fleetly thro' the gates, at midnight hour.
Oft from the prophets' lips
Moaned out the warning and the wail—Ah woe!
Woe for the home, the home! and for the chieftains, woe!
Woe for the bride-bed, warm
Yet from the lovely limbs, the impress of the form

Of her who loved her lord, awhile ago!
And woe! for him who stands
Shamed, silent, unreproachful, stretching hands
That find her not, and sees, yet will not see,
That she is far away!
And his sad fancy, yearning o'er the sea,
Shall summon and recall
Her wraith, once more to queen it in his hall.
And sad with many memories,
The fair cold beauty of each sculptured face—
And all to hatefulness is turned their grace,
Seen blankly by forlorn and hungering eyes!

antistrophe 2

And when the night is deep,
Come visions, sweet and sad, and bearing pain
Of hopings vain—
Void, void and vain, for scarce the sleeping sight
Has seen its old delight,
When thro' the grasps of love that bid it stay
It vanishes away
On silent wings that roam adown the ways of sleep.

Such are the sights, the sorrows fell,
About our hearth—and worse, whereof I may not tell.
But, all the wide town o'er,
Each home that sent its master far away
From Hellas' shore,
Feels the keen thrill of heart, the pang of loss, to-day.
For, truth to say,
The touch of bitter death is manifold!
Familiar was each face, and dear as life,
That went unto the war,
But thither, whence a warrior went of old,
Doth nought return—
Only a spear and sword, and ashes in an urn!

strophe 3

For Ares, lord of strife,
Who doth the swaying scales of battle hold,
War's money-changer, giving dust for gold,
Sends back, to hearts that held them dear,
Scant ash of warriors, wept with many a tear,
Light to the hand, but heavy to the soul;

Yea, fills the light urn full
With what survived the flame—
Death's dusty measure of a hero's frame!

Alas! one cries, *and yet alas again!*
Our chief is gone, the hero of the spear,
And hath not left his peer!
Ah woe! another moans—*my spouse is slain,*
The death of honour, rolled in dust and blood,
Slain for a woman's sin, a false wife's shame!
Such muttered words of bitter mood
Rise against those who went forth to reclaim;
Yea, jealous wrath creeps on against th' Atreides' name.

And others, far beneath the Ilian wall,
Sleep their last sleep—the goodly chiefs and tall,
Couched in the foeman's land, whereon they gave
Their breath, and lords of Troy, each in his Trojan grave.

antistrophe 3

Therefore for each and all the city's breast
Is heavy with a wrath supprest,
As deeply and deadly as a curse more loud
Flung by the common crowd:
And, brooding deeply, doth my soul await
Tidings of coming fate,
Buried as yet in darkness' womb.
For not forgetful is the high gods' doom
Against the sons of carnage: all too long
Seems the unjust to prosper and be strong,
Till the dark Furies come,
And smite with stern reversal all his home,
Down into dim obstruction—he is gone,
And help and hope, among the lost, is none!

O'er him who vaunteth an exceeding fame,
Impends a woe condign;
The vengeful bolt upon his eyes doth flame,
Sped from the hand divine.
This bliss be mine, ungrudged of God, to feel—
To tread no city to the dust,
Nor see my own life thrust
Down to a slave's estate beneath another's heel!

epode

Behold, throughout the city wide
Have the swift feet of Rumour hied,
  Roused by the joyful flame:
But is the news they scatter, sooth?
Or haply do they give for truth
  Some cheat which heaven doth frame?
A child were he and all unwise,
  Who let his heart with joy be stirred.
To see the beacon-fires arise,
  And then, beneath some thwarting word,
  Sicken anon with hope deferred.
  The edge of woman's insight still
  Good news from true divideth ill;
Light rumours leap within the bound
Then fences female credence round,
But, lightly born, as lightly dies
The tale that springs of her surmise.

(*Several days are assumed to have elapsed.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Soon shall we know whereof the bale-fires tell,[5]
The beacons, kindled with transmitted flame;
Whether, as well I deem, their tale is true,
Or whether like some dream delusive came
The welcome blaze but to befool our soul.
For lo! I see a herald from the shore
Draw hither, shadowed with the olive-wreath—
And thirsty dust, twin-brother of the clay,
Speaks plain of travel far and truthful news—
No dumb surmise, nor tongue of flame in smoke,
Fitfully kindled from the mountain pyre;
But plainlier shall his voice say, *All is well,*
Or—but away, forebodings adverse, now,
And on fair promise fair fulfilment come!
And whoso for the state prays otherwise,
Himself reap harvest of his ill desire!

(*A* HERALD *enters. He is an advance messenger from* AGAMEMNON'S *forces, which have just landed.*)

HERALD

O land of Argos, fatherland of mine!
To thee at last, beneath the tenth year's sun,

My feet return; the bark of my emprise,
Tho' one by one hope's anchors broke away,
Held by the last, and now rides safely here.
Long, long my soul despaired to win, in death,
Its longed-for rest within our Argive land:
And now all hail, O earth, and hail to thee,
New-risen sun! and hail our country's God,
High-ruling Zeus, and thou, the Pythian lord,
Whose arrows smote us once—smite thou no more!
Was not thy wrath wreaked full upon our heads,
O king Apollo, by Scamander's side?
Turn thou, be turned, be saviour, healer, now!
And hail, all gods who rule the street and mart
And Hermes hail! my patron and my pride,
Herald of heaven, and lord of heralds here!
And Heroes, ye who sped us on our way—
To one and all I cry, *Receive again*
With grace such Argives as the spear has spared.

Ah, home of royalty, belovèd halls,
And solemn shrines, and gods that front the morn!
Benign as erst, with sun-flushed aspect greet
The king returning after many days.
For as from night flash out the beams of day,
So out of darkness dawns a light, a king,
On you, on Argos—Agamemnon comes.
Then hail and greet him well! such meed befits
Him whose right hand hewed down the towers of Troy
With the great axe of Zeus who righteth wrong—
And smote the plain, smote down to nothingness
Each altar, every shrine; and far and wide
Dies from the whole land's face its offspring fair.
Such mighty yoke of fate he set on Troy—
Our lord and monarch, Atreus' elder son,
And comes at last with blissful honour home;
Highest of all who walk on earth to-day—
Not Paris nor the city's self that paid
Sin's price with him, can boast, *Whate'er befall,*
The guerdon we have won outweighs it all.
But at Fate's judgment-seat the robber stands
Condemned of rapine, and his prey is torn
Forth from his hands, and by his deed is reaped
A bloody harvest of his home and land

Gone down to death, and for his guilt and lust
His father's race pays double in the dust.

LEADER

Hail, herald of the Greeks, new-come from war.

HERALD

All hail! not death itself can fright me now.

LEADER

Was thine heart wrung with longing for thy land?

HERALD

So that this joy doth brim mine eyes with tears.

LEADER

On you too then this sweet distress did fall—

HERALD

How say'st thou? make me master of thy word.

LEADER

You longed for us who pined for you again.

HERALD

Craved the land us who craved it, love for love?

LEADER

Yea, till my brooding heart moaned out with pain.

HERALD

Whence thy despair, that mars the army's joy?

LEADER

Sole cure of wrong is silence, saith the saw.

HERALD

Thy kings afar, couldst thou fear other men?

LEADER

Death had been sweet, as thou didst say but now.

HERALD

'Tis true; Fate smiles at last. Throughout our toil,
These many years, some chances issued fair,
And some, I wot, were chequered with a curse.
But who, on earth, hath won the bliss of heaven,
Thro' time's whole tenor an unbroken weal?

I could a tale unfold of toiling oars,
Ill rest, scant landings on a shore rock-strewn,
All pains, all sorrows, for our daily doom.
And worse and hatefuller our woes on land;
For where we couched, close by the foeman's wall,
The river-plain was ever dank with dews,
Dropped from the sky, exuded from the earth,
A curse that clung unto our sodden garb,
And hair as horrent as a wild beast's fell.
Why tell the woes of winter, when the birds
Lay stark and stiff, so stern was Ida's snow?
Or summer's scorch, what time the stirless wave
Sank to its sleep beneath the noon-day sun?
Why mourn old woes? their pain has passed away;
And passed away, from those who fell, all care,
For evermore, to rise and live again.
Why sum the count of death, and render thanks
For life by moaning over fate malign?
Farewell, a long farewell to all our woes!
To us, the remnant of the host of Greece,
Comes weal beyond all counterpoise of woe;
Thus boast we rightfully to yonder sun,
Like him far-fleeted over sea and land.
The Argive host prevailed to conquer Troy,
And in the temples of the gods of Greece
Hung up these spoils, a shining sign to Time
Let those who learn this legend bless aright
The city and its chieftains, and repay
The meed of gratitude to Zeus who willed
And wrought the deed. So stands the tale fulfilled.

LEADER

Thy words o'erbear my doubt: for news of good,
The ear of age hath ever youth enow:
But those within and Clytemnestra's self
Would fain hear all; glad thou their ears and mine.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters from the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

That night, when first the fiery courier came,
In sign that Troy is ta'en and razed to earth,
So wild a cry of joy my lips gave out,
That I was chidden—*Hath the beacon watch*

Made sure unto thy soul the sack of Troy?
A very woman thou, whose heart leaps light
At wandering rumours!—and with words like these
They showed me how I strayed, misled of hope.
Yet on each shrine I set the sacrifice,
And, in the strain they held for feminine,
Went heralds thro' the city, to and fro,
With voice of loud proclaim, announcing joy;
And in each fane they lit and quenched with wine
The spicy perfumes fading in the flame.
All is fulfilled: I spare your longer tale—
The king himself anon shall tell me all.

Remains to think what honour best may greet
My lord, the majesty of Argos, home.
What day beams fairer on a woman's eyes
Than this, whereon she flings the portal wide,
To hail her lord, heaven-shielded, home from war?
This to my husband, that he tarry not,
But turn the city's longing into joy!
Yea, let him come, and coming may he find
A wife no other than he left her, true
And faithful as a watch-dog to his home,
His foemen's foe, in all her duties leal,
Trusty to keep for ten long years unmarred
The store whereon he set his master-seal.
Be steel deep-eyed, before ye look to see
Ill joy, ill fame, from other wight, in me!

HERALD

'Tis fairly said: thus speaks a noble dame,
Nor speaks amiss, when truth informs the boast.
(CLYTEMNESTRA *withdraws again into the palace.*)

LEADER

So has she spoken—be it yours to learn
By clear interpreters her specious word.
Turn to me, herald—tell me if anon
The second well-loved lord of Argos comes?
Hath Menelaus safely sped with you?

HERALD

Alas—brief boon unto my friends it were,
To flatter them, for truth, with falsehoods fair!

LEADER

Speak joy, if truth be joy, but truth, at worst—
Too plainly, truth and joy are here divorced.

HERALD

The hero and his bark were rapt away
Far from the Grecian fleet; 'tis truth I say.

LEADER

Whether in all men's sight from Ilion borne,
Or from the fleet by stress of weather torn?

HERALD

Full on the mark thy shaft of speech doth light,
And one short word hath told long woes aright.

LEADER

But say, what now of him each comrade saith?
What their forebodings, of his life or death?

HERALD

Ask me no more: the truth is known to none,
Save the earth-fostering, all-surveying Sun.

LEADER

Say, by what doom the fleet of Greece was driven?
How rose, how sank the storm, the wrath of heaven?

HERALD

Nay, ill it were to mar with sorrow's tale
The day of blissful news. The gods demand
Thanksgiving sundered from solicitude.
If one as herald came with rueful face
To say, *The curse has fallen, and the host*
Gone down to death; and one wide wound has reached
The city's heart, and out of many homes
Many are cast and consecrate to death,
Beneath the double scourge, that Ares loves,
The bloody pair, the fire and sword of doom—
If such sore burden weighed upon my tongue,
'Twere fit to speak such words as gladden fiends.
But—coming as he comes who bringeth news
Of safe return from toil, and issues fair,
To men rejoicing in a weal restored—
Dare I to dash good words with ill, and say

How the gods' anger smote the Greeks in storm?
For fire and sea, that erst held bitter feud,
Now swore conspiracy and pledged their faith,
Wasting the Argives worn with toil and war.
Night and great horror of the rising wave
Came o'er us, and the blasts that blow from Thrace
Clashed ship with ship, and some with plunging prow
Thro' scudding drifts of spray and raving storm
Vanished, as strays by some ill shepherd driven.
And when at length the sun rose bright, we saw
Th' Aegaean sea-field flecked with flowers of death,
Corpses of Grecian men and shattered hulls.
For us indeed, some god, as well I deem,
No human power, laid hand upon our helm,
Snatched us or prayed us from the powers of air,
And brought our bark thro' all, unharmed in hull:
And saving Fortune sat and steered us fair,
So that no surge should gulf us deep in brine,
Nor grind our keel upon a rocky shore.

So 'scaped we death that lurks beneath the sea,
But, under day's white light, mistrustful all
Of fortune's smile, we sat and brooded deep,
Shepherds forlorn of thoughts that wandered wild
O'er this new woe; for smitten was our host,
And lost as ashes scattered from the pyre.
Of whom if any draw his life-breath yet,
Be well assured, he deems of us as dead,
As we of him no other fate forebode.
But heaven save all! If Menelaus live,
He will not tarry, but will surely come:
Therefore if anywhere the high sun's ray
Descries him upon earth, preserved by Zeus,
Who wills not yet to wipe his race away,
Hope still there is that homeward he may wend.
Enough—thou hast the truth unto the end.

(*The* HERALD *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Say, from whose lips the presage fell?
Who read the future all too well,
And named her, in her natal hour,

Helen, the bride with war for dower?
'Twas one of the Invisible,
Guiding his tongue with prescient power.
On fleet, and host, and citadel,
War, sprung from her, and death did lour,
When from the bride-bed's fine-spun veil
She to the Zephyr spread her sail.
Strong blew the breeze—the surge closed o'er
The cloven track of keel and oar,
But while she fled, there drove along,
Fast in her wake, a mighty throng—
Athirst for blood, athirst for war,
Forward in fell pursuit they sprung,
Then leapt on Simois' bank ashore,
The leafy coppices among—
No rangers, they, of wood and field,
But huntsmen of the sword and shield.

antistrophe 1

Heaven's jealousy, that works its will,
Sped thus on Troy its destined ill,
Well named, at once, the Bride and Bane;
And loud rang out the bridal strain;
But they to whom that song befell
Did turn anon to tears again;
Zeus tarries, but avenges still
The husband's wrong, the household's stain!
He, the hearth's lord, brooks not to see
Its outraged hospitality.

Even now, and in far other tone,
Troy chants her dirge of mighty moan,
Woe upon Paris, woe and hate!
Who wooed his country's doom for mate—
This is the burthen of the groan,
Wherewith she wails disconsolate
The blood, so many of her own
Have poured in vain, to fend her fate;
Troy! thou hast fed and freed to roam
A lion-cub within thy home!

strophe 2

A suckling creature, newly ta'en
From mother's teat, still fully fain

Of nursing care; and oft caressed,
Within the arms, upon the breast,
Even as an infant, has it lain;
Or fawns and licks, by hunger pressed,
The hand that will assuage its pain;
In life's young dawn, a well-loved guest,
A fondling for the children's play,
A joy unto the old and grey.

antistrophe 2

But waxing time and growth betrays
The blood-thirst of the lion-race,
And, for the house's fostering care,
Unbidden all, it revels there,
And bloody recompense repays—
Rent flesh of kine, its talons tare:
A mighty beast, that slays, and slays,
And mars with blood the household fair,
A God-sent pest invincible,
A minister of fate and hell.

strophe 3

Even so to Ilion's city came by stealth
A spirit as of windless seas and skies,
A gentle phantom-form of joy and wealth,
With love's soft arrows speeding from its eyes—
Love's rose, whose thorn doth pierce the soul in subtle wise.

Ah, well-a-day! the bitter bridal-bed,
When the fair mischief lay by Paris' side!
What curse on palace and on people sped
With her, the Fury sent on Priam's pride,
By angered Zeus! what tears of many a widowed bride!

antistrophe 3

Long, long ago to mortals this was told,
How sweet security and blissful state
Have curses for their children—so men hold—
And for the man of all-too prosperous fate
Springs from a bitter seed some woe insatiate.

Alone, alone, I deem far otherwise;
Not bliss nor wealth it is, but impious deed,
From which that after-growth of ill doth rise!

Woe springs from wrong, the plant is like the seed—
While Right, in honour's house, doth its own likeness breed.

strophe 4

Some past impiety, some grey old crime,
Breeds the young curse, that wantons in our ill,
Early or late, when haps th' appointed time—
And out of light brings power of darkness still,
A master-fiend, a foe, unseen, invincible;

A pride accursed, that broods upon the race
And home in which dark Atè holds her sway—
Sin's child and Woe's, that wears its parents' face;

antistrophe 4

While Right in smoky cribs shines clear as day,
And decks with weal his life, who walks the righteous way.

From gilded halls, that hands polluted raise,
Right turns away with proud averted eyes,
And of the wealth, men stamp amiss with praise,
Heedless, to poorer, holier temples hies,
And to Fate's goal guides all, in its appointed wise.

(AGAMEMNON *enters, riding in a chariot and accompanied by a great procession.* CASSANDRA *follows in another chariot. The* CHORUS *sings its welcome.*)

Hail to thee, chief of Atreus' race,
Returning proud from Troy subdued!
How shall I greet thy conquering face?
How nor a fulsome praise obtrude,
Nor stint the meed of gratitude?
For mortal men who fall to ill
Take little heed of open truth,
But seek unto its semblance still:
The show of weeping and of ruth
To the forlorn will all men pay,
But, of the grief their eyes display,
Nought to the heart doth pierce its way.
And, with the joyous, they beguile
Their lips unto a feignèd smile,
And force a joy, unfelt the while;
But he who as a shepherd wise

Doth know his flock, can ne'er misread
Truth in the falsehood of his eyes,
Who veils beneath a kindly guise
A lukewarm love in deed.
And thou, our leader—when of yore
Thou badest Greece go forth to war
For Helen's sake—I dare avow
That then I held thee not as now;
That to my vision thou didst seem
Dyed in the hues of disesteem.
I held thee for a pilot ill,
And reckless, of thy proper will,
Endowing others doomed to die
With vain and forced audacity!
Now from my heart, ungrudgingly,
To those that wrought, this word be said—
Well fall the labour ye have sped—
Let time and search, O king, declare
What men within thy city's bound
Were loyal to the kingdom's care,
And who were faithless found.

AGAMEMNON (*still standing in the chariot*)
First, as is meet, a king's All-hail be said
To Argos, and the gods that guard the land—
Gods who with me availed to speed us home,
With me availed to wring from Priam's town
The due of justice. In the court of heaven
The gods in conclave sat and judged the cause,
Not from a pleader's tongue, and at the close,
Unanimous into the urn of doom
This sentence gave, *On Ilion and her men,*
Death: and where hope drew nigh to pardon's urn
No hand there was to cast a vote therein.
And still the smoke of fallen Ilion
Rises in sight of all men, and the flame
Of Atè's hecatomb is living yet,
And where the towers in dusty ashes sink,
Rise the rich fumes of pomp and wealth consumed
For this must all men pay unto the gods
The meed of mindful hearts and gratitude:
For by our hands the meshes of revenge
Closed on the prey, and for one woman's sake

Troy trodden by the Argive monster lies—
The foal, the shielded band that leapt the wall,
What time with autumn sank the Pleiades.
Yea, o'er the fencing wall a lion sprang
Ravening, and lapped his fill of blood of kings.

Such prelude spoken to the gods in full,
To you I turn, and to the hidden thing
Whereof ye spake but now: and in that thought
I am as you, and what ye say, say I.
For few are they who have such inborn grace,
As to look up with love, and envy not,
When stands another on the height of weal.
Deep in his heart, whom jealousy hath seized,
Her poison lurking doth enhance his load;
For now beneath his proper woes he chafes,
And sighs withal to see another's weal.

I speak not idly, but from knowledge sure—
There be who vaunt an utter loyalty,
That is but as the ghost of friendship dead,
A shadow in a glass, of faith gone by.
One only—he who went reluctant forth
Across the seas with me—Odysseus—he
Was loyal unto me with strength and will,
A trusty trace-horse bound unto my car.
Thus—be he yet beneath the light of day,
Or dead, as well I fear—I speak his praise.

Lastly, whate'er be due to men or gods,
With joint debate, in public council held,
We will decide, and warily contrive
That all which now is well may so abide:
For that which haply needs the healer's art,
That will we medicine, discerning well
If cautery or knife befit the time.

Now, to my palace and the shrines of home,
I will pass in, and greet you first and fair,
Ye gods, who bade me forth, and home again—
And long may Victory tarry in my train!

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters from the palace, followed by maidens bearing crimson robes.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Old men of Argos, lieges of our realm,
Shame shall not bid me shrink lest ye should see
The love I bear my lord. Such blushing fear
Dies at the last from hearts of human kind.
From mine own soul and from no alien lips,
I know and will reveal the life I bore,
Reluctant, through the lingering livelong years,
The while my lord beleaguered Ilion's wall.

First, that a wife sat sundered from her lord,
In widowed solitude, was utter woe—
And woe, to hear how rumour's many tongues
All boded evil—woe, when he who came
And he who followed spake of ill on ill,
Keening *Lost, lost, all lost!* thro' hall and bower.
Had this my husband met so many wounds,
As by a thousand channels rumour told,
No network e'er was full of holes as he.
Had he been slain, as oft as tidings came
That he was dead, he well might boast him now
A second Geryon of triple frame,
With triple robe of earth above him laid—
For that below, no matter—triply dead,
Dead by one death for every form he bore.
And thus distraught by news of wrath and woe,
Oft for self-slaughter had I slung the noose,
But others wrenched it from my neck away.
Hence haps it that Orestes, thine and mine,
The pledge and symbol of our wedded troth,
Stands not beside us now, as he should stand.
Nor marvel thou at this: he dwells with one
Who guards him loyally; 'tis Phocis' king,
Strophius, who warned me erst, *Bethink thee, queen,*
What woes of doubtful issue well may fall!
Thy lord in daily jeopardy at Troy,
While here a populace uncurbed may cry,
"Down with the council, down!" bethink thee too,
'Tis the world's way to set a harder heel
On fallen power.
For thy child's absence then
Such mine excuse, no wily afterthought.
For me, long since the gushing fount of tears

Is wept away; no drop is left to shed.
Dim are the eyes that ever watched till dawn,
Weeping, the bale-fires, piled for thy return,
Night after night unkindled. If I slept,
Each sound—the tiny humming of a gnat,
Roused me again, again, from fitful dreams
Wherein I felt thee smitten, saw thee slain,
Thrice for each moment of mine hour of sleep.

All this I bore, and now, released from woe,
I hail my lord as watch-dog of a fold,
As saving stay-rope of a storm-tossed ship,
As column stout that holds the roof aloft,
As only child unto a sire bereaved,
As land beheld, past hope, by crews forlorn,
As sunshine fair when tempest's wrath is past,
As gushing spring to thirsty wayfarer.
So sweet it is to 'scape the press of pain.
With such salute I bid my husband hail!
Nor heaven be wroth therewith! for long and hard
I bore that ire of old.
Sweet lord, step forth,
Step from thy car, I pray—nay, not on earth
Plant the proud foot, O king, that trod down Troy!
Women! why tarry ye, whose task it is
To spread your monarch's path with tapestry?
Swift, swift, with purple strew his passage fair,
That justice lead him to a home, at last,
He scarcely looked to see.
(*The attendant women spread the tapestry.*)
For what remains,
Zeal unsubdued by sleep shall nerve my hand
To work as right and as the gods command.

AGAMEMNON (*still in the chariot*)
Daughter of Leda, watcher o'er my home,
Thy greeting well befits mine absence long,
For late and hardly has it reached its end.
Know, that the praise which honour bids us crave,
Must come from others' lips, not from our own:
See too that not in fashion feminine
Thou make a warrior's pathway delicate;
Not unto me, as to some Eastern lord,

Bowing thyself to earth, make homage loud.
Strew not this purple that shall make each step
An arrogance; such pomp beseems the gods,
Not me. A mortal man to set his foot
On these rich dyes? I hold such pride in fear,
And bid thee honour me as man, not god.
Fear not—such footcloths and all gauds apart,
Loud from the trump of Fame my name is blown;
Best gift of heaven it is, in glory's hour,
To think thereon with soberness: and thou—
Bethink thee of the adage, *Call none blest*
Till peaceful death have crowned a life of weal.
'Tis said: I fain would fare unvexed by fear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, but unsay it—thwart not thou my will!

AGAMEMNON

Know, I have said, and will not mar my word.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Was it fear made this meekness to the gods?

AGAMEMNON

If cause be cause, 'tis mine for this resolve.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What, think'st thou, in thy place had Priam done?

AGAMEMNON

He surely would have walked on broidered robes.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then fear not thou the voice of human blame.

AGAMEMNON

Yet mighty is the murmur of a crowd.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Shrink not from envy, appanage of bliss.

AGAMEMNON

War is not woman's part, nor war of words.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yet happy victors well may yield therein.

AGAMEMNON

Dost crave for triumph in this petty strife?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Yield; of thy grace permit me to prevail!

AGAMEMNON

Then, if thou wilt, let some one stoop to loose
Swiftly these sandals, slaves beneath my foot;
And stepping thus upon the sea's rich dye,
I pray, *Let none among the gods look down*
With jealous eye on me—reluctant all,
To trample thus and mar a thing of price,
Wasting the wealth of garments silver-worth.
Enough hereof: and, for the stranger maid,
Lead her within, but gently: God on high
Looks graciously on him whom triumph's hour
Has made not pitiless. None willingly
Wear the slave's yoke—and she, the prize and flower
Of all we won, comes hither in my train,
Gift of the army to its chief and lord.
—Now, since in this my will bows down to thine,
I will pass in on purples to my home.

(*He descends from the chariot, and moves towards the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

A Sea there is—and who shall stay its springs?
And deep within its breast, a mighty store,
Precious as silver, of the purple dye,
Whereby the dipped robe doth its tint renew.
Enough of such, O king, within thy halls
There lies, a store that cannot fail; but I—
I would have gladly vowed unto the gods
Cost of a thousand garments trodden thus,
(Had once the oracle such gift required)
Contriving ransom for thy life preserved.
For while the stock is firm the foliage climbs,
Spreading a shade, what time the dog-star glows;
And thou, returning to thine hearth and home,
Art as a genial warmth in winter hours,
Or as a coolness, when the lord of heaven
Mellows the juice within the bitter grape.
Such boons and more doth bring into a home

The present footstep of its proper lord.
Zeus, Zeus, Fulfilment's lord! my vows fulfil,
And whatsoe'er it be, work forth thy will!
(*She follows* AGAMEMNON *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Wherefore for ever on the wings of fear
Hovers a vision drear
Before my boding heart? a strain,
Unbidden and unwelcome, thrills mine ear,
Oracular of pain.
Not as of old upon my bosom's throne
Sits Confidence, to spurn
Such fears, like dreams we know not to discern.
Old, old and grey long since the time has grown,
Which saw the linkèd cables moor
The fleet, when erst it came to Ilion's sandy shore;

antistrophe 1

And now mine eyes and not another's see
Their safe return.

Yet none the less in me
The inner spirit sings a boding song,
Self-prompted, sings the Furies' strain—
And seeks, and seeks in vain,
To hope and to be strong!

Ah! to some end of Fate, unseen, unguessed,
Are these wild throbbings of my heart and breast—
Yea, of some doom they tell—
Each pulse, a knell.
Lief, lief I were, that all
To unfulfilment's hidden realm might fall.

strophe 2

Too far, too far our mortal spirits strive,
Grasping at utter weal, unsatisfied—
Till the fell curse, that dwelleth hard beside,
Thrust down the sundering wall. Too fair they blow,
The gales that waft our bark on Fortune's tide!
Swiftly we sail, the sooner all to drive
Upon the hidden rock, the reef of woe.

Then if the hand of caution warily
Sling forth into the sea
Part of the freight, lest all should sink below,
From the deep death it saves the bark: even so,
Doom-laden though it be, once more may rise
His household, who is timely wise.

How oft the famine-stricken field
Is saved by God's large gift, the new year's yield!

antistrophe 2

But blood of man once spilled,
Once at his feet shed forth, and darkening the plain,—
Nor chant nor charm can call it back again.

So Zeus hath willed:
Else had he spared the leech Asclepius, skilled
To bring man from the dead: the hand divine
Did smite himself with death—a warning and a sign—

Ah me! if Fate, ordained of old,
Held not the will of gods constrained, controlled,
Helpless to us-ward, and apart—
Swifter than speech my heart
Had poured its presage out!
Now, fretting, chafing in the dark of doubt,
'Tis hopeless to unfold
Truth, from fear's tangled skein; and, yearning to proclaim
Its thought, my soul is prophecy and flame.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *comes out of the palace and addresses* CASSANDRA, *who has remained motionless in her chariot.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Get thee within thou too, Cassandra, go!
For Zeus to thee in gracious mercy grants
To share the sprinklings of the lustral bowl,
Beside the altar of his guardianship,
Slave among many slaves. What, haughty still?
Step from the car; Alcmena's son, 'tis said,
Was sold perforce and bore the yoke of old.
Ay, hard it is, but, if such fate befall,
'Tis a fair chance to serve within a home
Of ancient wealth and power. An upstart lord,

To whom wealth's harvest came beyond his hope,
Is as a lion to his slaves, in all
Exceeding fierce, immoderate in sway.
Pass in: thou hearest what our ways will be

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Clear unto thee, O maid, is her command,
But thou—within the toils of Fate thou art—
If such thy will, I urge thee to obey;
Yet I misdoubt thou dost nor hear nor heed.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I wot—unless like swallows she doth use
Some strange barbarian tongue from oversea—
My words must speak persuasion to her soul.

LEADER

Obey: there is no gentler way than this.
Step from the car's high seat and follow her.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Truce to this bootless waiting here without!
I will not stay: beside the central shrine
The victims stand, prepared for knife and fire—
Offerings from hearts beyond all hope made glad.
Thou—if thou reckest aught of my command,
'Twere well done soon: but if thy sense be shut
From these my words, let thy barbarian hand
Fulfil by gesture the default of speech.

LEADER

No native is she, thus to read thy words
Unaided: like some wild thing of the wood,
New-trapped, behold! she shrinks and glares on thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

'Tis madness and the rule of mind distraught,
Since she beheld her city sink in fire,
And hither comes, nor brooks the bit, until
In foam and blood her wrath be champed away.
See ye to her; unqueenly 'tis for me,
Unheeded thus to cast away my words.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters the palace.*)

LEADER

But with me pity sits in anger's place.
Poor maiden, come thou from the car; no way
There is but this—take up thy servitude.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou
Apollo, Apollo!

LEADER

Peace! shriek not to the bright prophetic god,
Who will not brook the suppliance of woe.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe, woe, alas! Earth, Mother Earth! and thou
Apollo, Apollo!

LEADER

Hark, with wild curse she calls anew on him,
Who stands far off and loathes the voice of wail.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Apollo, Apollo!
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,
Once and again, O thou, Destroyer named,
Thou hast destroyed me, thou, my love of old! [6]

LEADER

She grows presageful of her woes to come,
Slave tho' she be, instinct with prophecy.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Apollo, Apollo!
God of all ways, but only Death's to me,
O thou Apollo, thou Destroyer named!
What way hast led me, to what evil home?

LEADER

Know'st thou it not? The home of Atreus' race:
Take these my words for sooth and ask no more.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Home cursed of God! Bear witness unto me,
  Ye visioned woes within—
The blood-stained hands of them that smite their kin—
The strangling noose, and, spattered o'er
With human blood, the reeking floor!

LEADER

How like a sleuth-hound questing on the track,
Keen-scented unto blood and death she hies!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Ah! can the ghostly guidance fail,
Whereby my prophet-soul is onwards led?
Look! for their flesh the spectre-children wail,
Their sodden limbs on which their father fed!

LEADER

Long since we knew of thy prophetic fame,—
But for those deeds we seek no prophet's tongue.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

God! 'tis another crime—
Worse than the storied woe of olden time,
Cureless, abhorred, that one is plotting here—
A shaming death, for those that should be dear!
Alas! and far away, in foreign land,
He that should help doth stand!

LEADER

I knew th' old tales, the city rings withal—
But now thy speech is dark, beyond my ken.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

O wretch, O purpose fell!
Thou for thy wedded lord
The cleansing wave hast poured—
A treacherous welcome!
How the sequel tell?
Too soon 'twill come, too soon, for now, even now,
She smites him, blow on blow!

LEADER

Riddles beyond my rede—I peer in vain
Thro' the dim films that screen the prophecy.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

God! a new sight! a net, a snare of hell,
Set by her hand—herself a snare more fell!
A wedded wife, she slays her lord,
Helped by another hand!
Ye powers, whose hate

Of Atreus' home no blood can satiate,
Raise the wild cry above the sacrifice abhorred!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Why biddest thou some fiend, I know not whom,
Shriek o'er the house? Thine is no cheering word.
Back to my heart in frozen fear I feel
My wanning life-blood run—
The blood that round the wounding steel
Ebbs slow, as sinks life's parting sun—
Swift, swift and sure, some woe comes pressing on!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Away, away—keep him away—
The monarch of the herd, the pasture's pride,
Far from his mate! In treach'rous wrath,
Muffling his swarthy horns, with secret scathe
She gores his fenceless side!
Hark! in the brimming bath,
The heavy plash—the dying cry—
Hark—in the laver—hark, he falls by treachery!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I read amiss dark sayings such as thine,
Yet something warns me that they tell of ill.
O dark prophetic speech,
Ill tidings dost thou teach
Ever, to mortals here below!
Ever some tale of awe and woe
Thro' all thy windings manifold
Do we unriddle and unfold!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Ah well-a-day! the cup of agony,
Whereof I chant, foams with a draught for me.
Ah lord, ah leader, thou hast led me here—
Was't but to die with thee whose doom is near?

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Distraught thou art, divinely stirred,
And wailest for thyself a tuneless lay,
As piteous as the ceaseless tale
Wherewith the brown melodious bird
Doth ever Itys! Itys! wail,
Deep-bowered in sorrow, all its little life-time's day!

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Ah for thy fate, O shrill-voiced nightingale!
Some solace for thy woes did Heaven afford,
Clothed thee with soft brown plumes, and life apart from wail—
But for my death is edged the double-biting sword!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What pangs are these, what fruitless pain,
Sent on thee from on high?
Thou chantest terror's frantic strain,
Yet in shrill measured melody.
How thus unerring canst thou sweep along
The prophet's path of boding song?

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe, Paris, woe on thee! thy bridal joy
Was death and fire upon thy race and Troy!
And woe for thee, Scamander's flood!
Beside thy banks, O river fair,
I grew in tender nursing care
From childhood unto maidenhood!
Now not by thine, but by Cocytus' stream
And Acheron's banks shall ring my boding scream.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Too plain is all, too plain!
A child might read aright thy fateful strain.
Deep in my heart their piercing fang
Terror and sorrow set, the while I heard
That piteous, low, tender word,
Yet to mine ear and heart a crushing pang.

CASSANDRA (*chanting*)

Woe for my city, woe for Ilion's fall!
Father, how oft with sanguine stain
Streamed on thine altar-stone the blood of cattle, slain
That heaven might guard our wall!
But all was shed in vain.
Low lie the shattered towers whereas they fell,
And I—ah burning heart!—shall soon lie low as well.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Of sorrow is thy song, of sorrow still!
Alas, what power of ill

Sits heavy on thy heart and bids thee tell
In tears of perfect moan thy deadly tale?
Some woe—I know not what—must close thy pious wail.

CASSANDRA (*more calmly*)

List! for no more the presage of my soul,
Bride-like, shall peer from its secluding veil;
But as the morning wind blows clear the east,
More bright shall blow the wind of prophecy,
And as against the low bright line of dawn
Heaves high and higher yet the rolling wave,
So in the clearing skies of prescience
Dawns on my soul a further, deadlier woe,
And I will speak, but in dark speech no more.
Bear witness, ye, and follow at my side—
I scent the trail of blood, shed long ago.
Within this house a choir abidingly
Chants in harsh unison the chant of ill;
Yea, and they drink, for more enhardened joy,
Man's blood for wine, and revel in the halls,
Departing never, Furies of the home.
They sit within, they chant the primal curse,
Each spitting hatred on that crime of old,
The brother's couch, the love incestuous
That brought forth hatred to the ravisher.
Say, is my speech or wild and erring now,
Or doth its arrow cleave the mark indeed?
They called me once, *The prophetess of lies,*
The wandering hag, the pest of every door—
Attest ye now, *She knows in very sooth*
The house's curse, the storied infamy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet how should oath—how loyally soe'er
I swear it—aught avail thee? In good sooth,
My wonder meets thy claim: I stand amazed
That thou, a maiden born beyond the seas,
Dost as a native know and tell aright
Tales of a city of an alien tongue.

CASSANDRA

That is my power—a boon Apollo gave.

LEADER

God though he were, yearning for mortal maid?

CASSANDRA

Ay! what seemed shame of old is shame no more.

LEADER

Such finer sense suits not with slavery.

CASSANDRA

He strove to win me, panting for my love.

LEADER

Came ye by compact unto bridal joys?

CASSANDRA

Nay—for I plighted troth, then foiled the god.

LEADER

Wert thou already dowered with prescience?

CASSANDRA

Yea—prophetess to Troy of all her doom.

LEADER

How left thee then Apollo's wrath unscathed?

CASSANDRA

I, false to him, seemed prophet false to all.

LEADER

Not so—to us at least thy words seem sooth.

CASSANDRA

Woe for me, woe! Again the agony—
Dread pain that sees the future all too well
With ghastly preludes whirls and racks my soul.
Behold ye—yonder on the palace roof
The spectre-children sitting—look, such things
As dreams are made on, phantoms as of babes,
Horrible shadows, that a kinsman's hand
Hath marked with murder, and their arms are full—
A rueful burden—see, they hold them up,
The entrails upon which their father fed!

For this, for this, I say there plots revenge
A coward lion, couching in the lair—

Guarding the gate against my master's foot—
My master—mine—I bear the slave's yoke now,
And he, the lord of ships, who trod down Troy,
Knows not the fawning treachery of tongue
Of this thing false and dog-like—how her speech
Glozes and sleeks her purpose, till she win
By ill fate's favour the desirèd chance,
Moving like Atè to a secret end.
O aweless soul! the woman slays her lord—
Woman? what loathsome monster of the earth
Were fit comparison? The double snake—
Or Scylla, where she dwells, the seaman's bane,
Girt round about with rocks? some hag of hell,
Raving a truceless curse upon her kin?
Hark—even now she cries exultingly
The vengeful cry that tells of battle turned—
How fain, forsooth, to greet her chief restored!
Nay then, believe me not: what skills belief
Or disbelief? Fate works its will—and thou
Wilt see and say in ruth, *Her tale was true.*

LEADER

Ah—'tis Thyestes' feast on kindred flesh—
I guess her meaning and with horror thrill,
Hearing no shadow'd hint of th' o'er-true tale,
But its full hatefulness: yet, for the rest,
Far from the track I roam, and know no more.

CASSANDRA

'Tis Agamemnon's doom thou shalt behold.

LEADER

Peace, hapless woman, to thy boding words!

CASSANDRA

Far from my speech stands he who sains and saves.

LEADER

Ay—were such doom at hand—which God forbid!

CASSANDRA

Thou prayest idly—these move swift to slay.

LEADER

What man prepares a deed of such despite?

CASSANDRA

Fool! thus to read amiss mine oracles.

LEADER

Deviser and device are dark to me.

CASSANDRA

Dark! all too well I speak the Grecian tongue.

LEADER

Ay—but in thine, as in Apollo's strains,
Familiar is the tongue, but dark the thought.

CASSANDRA

Ah, ah the fire! it waxes, nears me now—
Woe, woe for me, Apollo of the dawn!

Lo, how the woman-thing, the lioness
Couched with the wolf—her noble mate afar—
Will slay me, slave forlorn! Yea, like some witch,
She drugs the cup of wrath, that slays her lord,
With double death—his recompense for me!
Ay, 'tis for me, the prey he bore from Troy,
That she hath sworn his death, and edged the steel!
Ye wands, ye wreaths that cling around my neck,
Ye showed me prophetess yet scorned of all—
I stamp you into death, or e'er I die—
Down, to destruction!
Thus I stand revenged—
Go, crown some other with a prophet's woe.
Look! it is he, it is Apollo's self
Rending from me the prophet-robe he gave.
God! while I wore it yet, thou saw'st me mocked
There at my home by each malicious mouth—
To all and each, an undivided scorn.
The name alike and fate of witch and cheat—
Woe, poverty, and famine—all I bore;
And at this last the god hath brought me here
Into death's toils, and what his love had made,
His hate unmakes me now: and I shall stand
Not now before the altar of my home,
But me a slaughter-house and block of blood
Shall see hewn down, a reeking sacrifice.
Yet shall the gods have heed of me who die,

For by their will shall one requite my doom.
He, to avenge his father's blood outpoured,
Shall smite and slay with matricidal hand.
Ay, he shall come—tho' far away he roam,
A banished wanderer in a stranger's land—
To crown his kindred's edifice of ill,
Called home to vengeance by his father's fall:
Thus have the high gods sworn, and shall fulfil.
And now why mourn I, tarrying on earth,
Since first mine Ilion has found its fate
And I beheld, and those who won the wall
Pass to such issue as the gods ordain?
I too will pass and like them dare to die!
(*She turns and looks upon the palace door.*)
Portal of Hades, thus I bid thee hail!
Grant me one boon—a swift and mortal stroke,
That all unwrung by pain, with ebbing blood
Shed forth in quiet death, I close mine eyes.

LEADER

Maid of mysterious woes, mysterious lore,
Long was thy prophecy: but if aright
Thou readest all thy fate, how, thus unscared,
Dost thou approach the altar of thy doom,
As fronts the knife some victim, heaven-controlled?

CASSANDRA

Friends, there is no avoidance in delay.

LEADER

Yet who delays the longest, his the gain.

CASSANDRA

The day is come—flight were small gain to me!

LEADER

O brave endurance of a soul resolved!

CASSANDRA

That were ill praise, for those of happier doom.

LEADER

All fame is happy, even famous death.

CASSANDRA

Ah sire, ah brethren, famous once were ye!
(*She moves to enter the house, then starts back.*)

LEADER

What fear is this that scares thee from the house?

CASSANDRA

Pah!

LEADER

What is this cry? some dark despair of soul?

CASSANDRA

Pah! the house fumes with stench and spilth of blood.

LEADER

How? 'tis the smell of household offerings.

CASSANDRA

'Tis rank as charnel-scent from open graves.

LEADER

Thou canst not mean this scented Syrian nard?

CASSANDRA

Nay, let me pass within to cry aloud
The monarch's fate and mine—enough of life.
Ah friends!
Bear to me witness, since I fall in death,
That not as birds that shun the bush and scream
I moan in idle terror. This attest
When for my death's revenge another dies,
A woman for a woman, and a man
Falls, for a man ill-wedded to his curse.
Grant me this boon—the last before I die.

LEADER

Brave to the last! I mourn thy doom foreseen.

CASSANDRA

Once more one utterance, but not of wail,
Though for my death—and then I speak no more.

Sun! thou whose beam I shall not see again,
To thee I cry, Let those whom vengeance calls

To slay their kindred's slayers, quit withal
The death of me, the slave, the fenceless prey.

Ah state of mortal man! in time of weal,
A line, a shadow! and if ill fate fall,
One wet sponge-sweep wipes all our trace away—
And this I deem less piteous, of the twain.

(*She enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Too true it is! our mortal state
With bliss is never satiate,
And none, before the palace high
And stately of prosperity,
Cries to us with a voice of fear,
Away! 'tis ill to enter here!

Lo! this our lord hath trodden down,
By grace of heaven, old Priam's town,
And praised as god he stands once more
On Argos' shore!
Yet now—if blood shed long ago
Cries out that other blood shall flow—
His life-blood, his, to pay again
The stern requital of the slain—
Peace to that braggart's vaunting vain,
Who, having heard the chieftain's tale,
Yet boasts of bliss untouched by bale!

(*A loud cry is heard from within.*)

VOICE OF AGAMEMNON

O I am sped—a deep, a mortal blow.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Listen, listen! who is screaming as in mortal agony?

VOICE OF AGAMEMNON

O! O! again, another, another blow!

LEADER

The bloody act is over—I have heard the monarch's cry—
Let us swiftly take some counsel, lest we too be doomed to die.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

'Tis best, I judge, aloud for aid to call,
"Ho! loyal Argives! to the palace, all!"

ANOTHER

Better, I deem, ourselves to bear the aid,
And drag the deed to light, while drips the blade.

ANOTHER

Such will is mine, and what thou say'st I say:
Swiftly to act! the time brooks no delay.

ANOTHER

Ay, for 'tis plain, this prelude of their song
Foretells its close in tyranny and wrong.

ANOTHER

Behold, we tarry—but thy name, Delay,
They spurn, and press with sleepless hand to slay.

ANOTHER

I know not what 'twere well to counsel now—
Who wills to act, 'tis his to counsel how.

ANOTHER

Thy doubt is mine: for when a man is slain,
I have no words to bring his life again.

ANOTHER

What? e'en for life's sake, bow us to obey
These house-defilers and their tyrant sway?

ANOTHER

Unmanly doom! 'twere better far to die—
Death is a gentler lord than tyranny.

ANOTHER

Think well—must cry or sign of woe or pain
Fix our conclusion that the chief is slain?

ANOTHER

Such talk befits us when the deed we see—
Conjecture dwells afar from certainty.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I read one will from many a diverse word,
To know aright, how stands it with our lord!

(*The central doors of the palace open, disclosing* CLYTEMNESTRA, *who comes forward. She has blood smeared upon her forehead. The body of* AGAMEMNON *lies, muffled in a long robe, within a silver-sided laver; the corpse of* CASSANDRA *is laid beside him.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ho, ye who heard me speak so long and oft
The glozing word that led me to my will—
Hear how I shrink not to unsay it all!
How else should one who willeth to requite
Evil for evil to an enemy
Disguised as friend, weave the mesh straitly round him,
Not to be overleaped, a net of doom?
This is the sum and issue of old strife,
Of me deep-pondered and at length fulfilled.
All is avowed, and as I smote I stand
With foot set firm upon a finished thing!
I turn not to denial: thus I wrought
So that he could nor flee nor ward his doom.
Even as the trammel hems the scaly shoal,
I trapped him with inextricable toils,
The ill abundance of a baffling robe;
Then smote him, once, again—and at each wound
He cried aloud, then as in death relaxed
Each limb and sank to earth; and as he lay,
Once more I smote him, with the last third blow,
Sacred to Hades, saviour of the dead.
And thus he fell, and as he passed away,
Spirit with body chafed; each dying breath
Flung from his breast swift bubbling jets of gore,
And the dark sprinklings of the rain of blood
Fell upon me; and I was fain to feel
That dew—not sweeter is the rain of heaven
To cornland, when the green sheath teems with grain.
Elders of Argos—since the thing stands so,
I bid you to rejoice, if such your will:
Rejoice or not, I vaunt and praise the deed,
And well I ween, if seemly it could be,
'Twere not ill done to pour libations here,
Justly—ay, more than justly—on his corpse
Who filled his home with curses as with wine,
And thus returned to drain the cup he filled.

LEADER

I marvel at thy tongue's audacity,
To vaunt thus loudly o'er a husband slain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ye hold me as a woman, weak of will,
And strive to sway me: but my heart is stout,
Nor fears to speak its uttermost to you,
Albeit ye know its message. Praise or blame,
Even as ye list,—I reck not of your words.
Lo! at my feet lies Agamemnon slain,
My husband once—and him this hand of mine,
A right contriver, fashioned for his death.
Behold the deed!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woman, what deadly birth,
What venomed essence of the earth
Or dark distilment of the wave,
To thee such passion gave,
Nerving thine hand
To set upon thy brow this burning crown,
The curses of thy land?
Our king by thee cut off, hewn down!
Go forth—they cry—*accursèd and forlorn,*
To hate and scorn!

CLYTEMNESTRA

O ye just men, who speak my sentence now,
The city's hate, the ban of all my realm!
Ye had no voice of old to launch such doom
On him, my husband, when he held as light
My daughter's life as that of sheep or goat,
One victim from the thronging fleecy fold!
Yea, slew in sacrifice his child and mine,
The well-loved issue of my travail-pangs,
To lull and lay the gales that blew from Thrace.
That deed of his, I say, that stain and shame,
Had rightly been atoned by banishment;
But ye, who then were dumb, are stern to judge
This deed of mine that doth affront your ears.
Storm out your threats, yet knowing this for sooth,
That I am ready, if your hand prevail
As mine now doth, to bow beneath your sway:

If God say nay, it shall be yours to learn
By chastisement a late humility.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Bold is thy craft, and proud
Thy confidence, thy vaunting loud;
Thy soul, that chose a murd'ress' fate,
Is all with blood elate—
Maddened to know
The blood not yet avenged, the damnèd spot
Crimson upon thy brow.
But Fate prepares for thee thy lot—
Smitten as thou didst smite, without a friend,
To meet thine end!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Hear then the sanction of the oath I swear—
By the great vengeance for my murdered child,
By Atè, by the Fury unto whom
This man lies sacrificed by hand of mine,
I do not look to tread the hall of Fear,
While in this hearth and home of mine there burns
The light of love—Aegisthus—as of old
Loyal, a stalwart shield of confidence—
As true to me as this slain man was false,
Wronging his wife with paramours at Troy,
Fresh from the kiss of each Chryseis there!
Behold him dead—behold his captive prize,
Seeress and harlot—comfort of his bed,
True prophetess, true paramour—I wot
The sea-bench was not closer to the flesh,
Full oft, of every rower, than was she.
See, ill they did, and ill requites them now.
His death ye know: she as a dying swan
Sang her last dirge, and lies, as erst she lay,
Close to his side, and to my couch has left
A sweet new taste of joys that know no fear.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ah woe and well-a-day! I would that Fate—
Not bearing agony too great,
Nor stretching me too long on couch of pain—
Would bid mine eyelids keep

The morningless and unawakening sleep! [7]
For life is weary, now my lord is slain,
The gracious among kings!
Hard fate of old he bore and many grievous things,
And for a woman's sake, on Ilian land—
Now is his life hewn down, and by a woman's hand.

refrain 1

O Helen, O infatuate soul,
Who bad'st the tides of battle roll,
O'erwhelming thousands, life on life,
'Neath Ilion's wall!
And now lies dead the lord of all.
The blossom of thy storied sin
Bears blood's inexpiable stain,
O thou that erst, these halls within,
Wert unto all a rock of strife,
A husband's bane!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Peace! pray not thou for death as though
Thine heart was whelmed beneath this woe,
Nor turn thy wrath aside to ban
The name of Helen, nor recall
How she, one bane of many a man,
Sent down to death the Danaan lords,
To sleep at Troy the sleep of swords,
And wrought the woe that shattered all.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Fiend of the race! that swoopest fell
Upon the double stock of Tantalus,
Lording it o'er me by a woman's will,
Stern, manful, and imperious—
A bitter sway to me!
Thy very form I see,
Like some grim raven, perched upon the slain,
Exulting o'er the crime, aloud, in tuneless strain!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Right was that word—thou namest well
The brooding race-fiend, triply fell!
From him it is that murder's thirst,

Blood-lapping, inwardly is nursed—
Ere time the ancient scar can sain,
New blood comes welling forth again.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Grim is his wrath and heavy on our home,
That fiend of whom thy voice has cried,
Alas, an omened cry of woe unsatisfied,
An all-devouring doom!

Ah woe, ah Zeus! from Zeus all things befall—
Zeus the high cause and finisher of all!—
Lord of our mortal state, by him are willed
All things, by him fulfilled!

refrain 2

Yet ah my king, my king no more!
What words to say, what tears to pour
Can tell my love for thee?
The spider-web of treachery
She wove and wound, thy life around,
And lo! I see thee lie,
And thro' a coward, impious wound
Pant forth thy life and die!
A death of shame—ah woe on woe!
A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

My guilt thou harpest, o'er and o'er!
I bid thee reckon me no more
As Agamemnon's spouse.
The old Avenger, stern of mood
For Atreus and his feast of blood,
Hath struck the lord of Atreus' house,
And in the semblance of his wife
The king hath slain.—
Yea, for the murdered children's life,
A chieftain's in requital ta'en.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Thou guiltless of this murder, thou!
Who dares such thought avow?

Yet it may be, wroth for the parent's deed,
The fiend hath holpen thee to slay the son.
Dark Ares, god of death, is pressing on
Thro' streams of blood by kindred shed,
Exacting the accompt for children dead,
For clotted blood, for flesh on which their sire did feed.

refrain 2

Yet ah my king, my king no more!
What words to say, what tears to pour
Can tell my love for thee?
The spider-web of treachery
She wove and wound, thy life around,
And lo! I see thee lie,
And thro' a coward, impious wound
Pant forth thy life and die!
A death of shame—ah woe on woe!
A treach'rous hand, a cleaving blow!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

I deem not that the death he died
Had overmuch of shame:
For this was he who did provide
Foul wrong unto his house and name:
His daughter, blossom of my womb,
He gave unto a deadly doom,
Iphigenia, child of tears!
And as he wrought, even so he fares.
Nor be his vaunt too loud in hell;
For by the sword his sin he wrought,
And by the sword himself is brought
Among the dead to dwell.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Ah whither shall I fly?
For all in ruin sinks the kingly hall;
Nor swift device nor shift of thought have I,
To 'scape its fall.
A little while the gentler rain-drops fail;
I stand distraught—a ghastly interval,
Till on the roof-tree rings the bursting hail
Of blood and doom. Even now fate whets the steel
On whetstones new and deadlier than of old,

The steel that smites, in Justice' hold,
Another death to deal.
O Earth! that I had lain at rest
And lapped for ever in thy breast,
Ere I had seen my chieftain fall
Within the laver's silver wall,
Low-lying on dishonoured bier!
And who shall give him sepulchre,
And who the wail of sorrow pour?
Woman, 'tis thine no more!
A graceless gift unto his shade
Such tribute, by his murd'ress paid!
Strive not thus wrongly to atone
The impious deed thy hand hath done.
Ah who above the god-like chief
Shall weep the tears of loyal grief?
Who speak above his lowly grave
The last sad praises of the brave?

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Peace! for such task is none of thine.
By me he fell, by me he died,
And now his burial rites be mine!
Yet from these halls no mourners' train
Shall celebrate his obsequies;
Only by Acheron's rolling tide
His child shall spring unto his side,
And in a daughter's loving wise
Shall clasp and kiss him once again!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Lo! sin by sin and sorrow dogg'd by sorrow—
And who the end can know?
The slayer of to-day shall die to-morrow—
The wage of wrong is woe.
While Time shall be, while Zeus in heaven is lord,
His law is fixed and stern;
On him that wrought shall vengeance be outpoured—
The tides of doom return.
The children of the curse abide within
These halls of high estate—
And none can wrench from off the home of sin
The clinging grasp of fate.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*chanting*)

Now walks thy word aright, to tell
This ancient truth of oracle;
But I with vows of sooth will pray
To him, the power that holdeth sway
O'er all the race of Pleisthenes—
Tho' dark the deed and deep the guilt,
With this last blood, my hands have spilt,
I pray thee let thine anger cease!
I pray thee pass from us away
To some new race in other lands,
There, if thou wilt, to wrong and slay
The lives of men by kindred hands.

For me 'tis all sufficient meed,
Tho' little wealth or power were won,
So I can say, *'Tis past and done.*
The bloody lust and murderous,
The inborn frenzy of our house,
Is ended, by my deed!

(AEGISTHUS *and his armed attendants enter.*)

AEGISTHUS

Dawn of the day of rightful vengeance, hail!
I dare at length aver that gods above
Have care of men and heed of earthly wrongs.
I, I who stand and thus exult to see
This man lie wound in robes the Furies wove,
Slain in the requital of his father's craft.
Take ye the truth, that Atreus, this man's sire,
The lord and monarch of this land of old,
Held with my sire Thyestes deep dispute,
Brother with brother, for the prize of sway,
And drave him from his home to banishment.
Thereafter, the lorn exile homeward stole
And clung a suppliant to the hearth divine,
And for himself won this immunity—
Not with his own blood to defile the land
That gave him birth. But Atreus, godless sire
Of him who here lies dead, this welcome planned—
With zeal that was not love he feigned to hold
In loyal joy a day of festal cheer,
And bade my father to his board, and set

Before him flesh that was his children once.
First, sitting at the upper board alone,
He hid the fingers and the feet, but gave
The rest—and readily Thyestes took
What to his ignorance no semblance wore
Of human flesh, and ate: behold what curse
That eating brought upon our race and name!
For when he knew what all unhallowed thing
He thus had wrought, with horror's bitter cry
Back-starting, spewing forth the fragments foul,
On Pelops' house a deadly curse he spake—
As darkly as I spurn this damnèd food,
So perish all the race of Pleisthenes!
Thus by that curse fell he whom here ye see,
And I—who else?—this murder wove and planned;
For me, an infant yet in swaddling bands,
Of the three children youngest, Atreus sent
To banishment by my sad father's side:
But Justice brought me home once more, grown now
To manhood's years; and stranger tho' I was,
My right hand reached unto the chieftain's life,
Plotting and planning all that malice bade.
And death itself were honour now to me,
Beholding him in Justice' ambush ta'en.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Aegisthus, for this insolence of thine
That vaunts itself in evil, take my scorn.
Of thine own will, thou sayest, thou hast slain
The chieftain, by thine own unaided plot
Devised the piteous death: I rede thee well,
Think not thy head shall 'scape, when right prevails,
The people's ban, the stones of death and doom.

AEGISTHUS

This word from thee, this word from one who rows
Low at the oars beneath, what time we rule,
We of the upper tier? Thou'lt know anon,
'Tis bitter to be taught again in age,
By one so young, submission at the word.
But iron of the chain and hunger's throes
Can minister unto an o'erswoln pride
Marvellous well, ay, even in the old.

Hast eyes, and seest not this? Peace—kick not thus
Against the pricks, unto thy proper pain!

LEADER

Thou womanish man, waiting till war did cease,
Home-watcher and defiler of the couch,
And arch-deviser of the chieftain's doom!

AEGISTHUS

Bold words again! but they shall end in tears.
The very converse, thine, of Orpheus' tongue:
He roused and led in ecstasy of joy
All things that heard his voice melodious;
But thou as with the futile cry of curs
Wilt draw men wrathfully upon thee. Peace!
Or strong subjection soon shall tame thy tongue.

LEADER

Ay, thou art one to hold an Argive down—
Thou, skilled to plan the murder of the king,
But not with thine own hand to smite the blow!

AEGISTHUS

That fraudful force was woman's very part,
Not mine, whom deep suspicion from of old
Would have debarred. Now by his treasure's aid
My purpose holds to rule the citizens.
But whoso will not bear my guiding hand,
Him for his corn-fed mettle I will drive
Not as a trace-horse, light-caparisoned,
But to the shafts with heaviest harness bound.
Famine, the grim mate of the dungeon dark,
Shall look on him and shall behold him tame.

LEADER

Thou losel soul, was then thy strength too slight
To deal in murder, while a woman's hand,
Staining and shaming Argos and its gods,
Availed to slay him? Ho, if anywhere
The light of life smite on Orestes' eyes,
Let him, returning by some guardian fate,
Hew down with force her paramour and her!

AEGISTHUS

How thy word and act shall issue, thou shalt shortly understand.

LEADER

Up to action, O my comrades! for the fight is hard at hand.
Swift, your right hands to the sword hilt! bare the weapon as for strife—

AEGISTHUS

Lo! I too am standing ready, hand on hilt for death or life.

LEADER

'Twas thy word and we accept it: onward to the chance of war!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, enough, enough, my champion! we will smite and slay no more.
Already have we reaped enough the harvest-field of guilt:
Enough of wrong and murder, let no other blood be spilt.
Peace, old men! and pass away unto the homes by Fate decreed,
Lest ill valour meet our vengeance—'twas a necessary deed.
But enough of toils and troubles—be the end, if ever, now,
Ere thy talon, O Avenger, deal another deadly blow.
'Tis a woman's word of warning, and let who will list thereto.

AEGISTHUS

But that these should loose and lavish reckless blossoms of the tongue,
And in hazard of their fortune cast upon me words of wrong,
And forget the law of subjects, and revile their ruler's word—

LEADER

Ruler? but 'tis not for Argives, thus to own a dastard lord!

AEGISTHUS

I will follow to chastise thee in my coming days of sway.

LEADER

Not if Fortune guide Orestes safely on his homeward way.

AEGISTHUS

Ah, well I know how exiles feed on hopes of their return.

LEADER

Fare and batten on pollution of the right, while 'tis thy turn.

AEGISTHUS

Thou shalt pay, be well assurèd, heavy quittance for thy pride.

LEADER

Crow and strut, with her to watch thee, like a cock, his mate beside!

CLYTEMNESTRA

Heed not thou too highly of them—let the cur-pack growl and yell:
I and thou will rule the palace and will order all things well.

(AEGISTHUS *and* CLYTEMNESTRA *move towards the palace, as the* CHORUS *sullenly withdraws.*)

1. He is alluding to Clytemnestra.

2. An "ox on the tongue" refers to a proverbial expression connoting complete silence.

3. Morshead's note here reads, "These are Uranus and Cronus, predecessors of Zeus on the throne of heaven."

4. A complete discussion of the problem of the fire beacon, coupled with an ingenious explanation, probably not tenable, may be found in A. W. Verrall's introduction to his text of the *Agamemnon.*

5. The lapse of several days is assumed to take place here. Critics are not unanimous in accepting this view. Morshead's translation for line 587 has been altered to accord with the theory here adopted.

6. Morshead, in a note to this passage, has pointed to the overwhelming difficulties which face the translator in his attempt to render it in English.

7. Morshead quotes as his source for this line a passage from M. Arnold's *Thyrsis.*

VI
THE CHOEPHORI

Characters in the Play

Orestes, *son of* Agamemnon *and* Clytemnestra
Chorus of Slave Women
Electra, *sister of* Orestes
A Nurse
Clytemnestra
Aegisthus
An Attendant
Pylades, *friend of* Orestes.

THE CHOEPHORI

(SCENE:—*By the tomb of Agamemnon near the palace in Argos.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter, dressed as travellers.* ORESTES *carries two locks of hair in his hand.*)

ORESTES

LORD of the shades and patron of the realm
That erst my father swayed, list now my prayer,
Hermes, and save me with thine aiding arm,
Me who from banishment returning stand
On this my country; lo, my foot is set
On this grave-mound, and herald-like, as thou,
Once and again, I bid my father hear.
And these twin locks, from mine head shorn, I bring,
And one to Inachus the river-god,
My young life's nurturer, I dedicate,
And one in sign of mourning unfulfilled
I lay, though late, on this my father's grave.
For O my father, not beside thy corse
Stood I to wail thy death, nor was my hand
Stretched out to bear thee forth to burial.

What sight is yonder? what this woman-throng
Hitherward coming, by their sable garb
Made manifest as mourners? What hath chanced?
Doth some new sorrow hap within the home?
Or rightly may I deem that they draw near
Bearing libations, such as soothe the ire
Of dead men angered, to my father's grave?
Nay, such they are indeed; for I descry
Electra mine own sister pacing hither,
In moody grief conspicuous. Grant, O Zeus,
Grant me my father's murder to avenge—

Be thou my willing champion!
Pylades,
Pass we aside, till rightly I discern
Wherefore these women throng in suppliance.

(PYLADES *and* ORESTES *withdraw; the* CHORUS *enters bearing vessels for libation;* ELECTRA *follows them; they pace slowly towards the tomb of Agamemnon.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Forth from the royal halls by high command
I bear libations for the dead.
Rings on my smitten breast my smiting hand,
And all my cheek is rent and red,
Fresh-furrowed by my nails, and all my soul
This many a day doth feed on cries of dole.
And trailing tatters of my vest,
In looped and windowed raggedness forlorn,
Hang rent around my breast,
Even as I, by blows of Fate most stern
Saddened and torn.

antistrophe 1

Oracular thro' visions, ghastly clear,
Bearing a blast of wrath from realms below,
And stiffening each rising hair with dread,
Came out of dream-land Fear,
And, loud and awful, bade
The shriek ring out at midnight's witching hour,
And brooded, stern with woe,
Above the inner house, the woman's bower
And seers inspired did read the dream on oath,
Chanting aloud *In realms below*
The dead are wroth;
Against their slayers yet their ire doth glow.

strophe 2

Therefore to bear this gift of graceless worth—
O Earth, my nursing mother!—
The woman god-accurs'd doth send me forth
Lest one crime bring another.
Ill is the very word to speak, for none
Can ransom or atone
For blood once shed and darkening the plain.

O hearth of woe and bane,
O state that low doth lie!
Sunless, accursed of men, the shadows brood
Above the home of murdered majesty.

antistrophe 2

Rumour of might, unquestioned, unsubdued,
Pervading ears and soul of lesser men,
Is silent now and dead.
Yet rules a viler dread;
For bliss and power, however won,
As gods, and more than gods, dazzle our mortal ken.

Justice doth mark, with scales that swiftly sway,
Some that are yet in light;
Others in interspace of day and night,
Till Fate arouse them, stay;
And some are lapped in night, where all things are undone.

strophe 3

On the life-giving lap of Earth
Blood hath flowed forth;
And now, the seed of vengeance, clots the plain—
Unmelting, uneffaced the stain.
And Atè tarries long, but at the last
The sinner's heart is cast
Into pervading, waxing pangs of pain.

antistrophe 3

Lo, when man's force doth ope
The virgin doors, there is nor cure nor hope
For what is lost,—even so, I deem,
Though in one channel ran Earth's every stream,
Laving the hand defiled from murder's stain,
It were in vain.

epode

And upon me—ah me!—the gods have laid
The woe that wrapped round Troy,
What time they led me down from home and kin
Unto a slave's employ—
The doom to bow the head
And watch our master's will
Work deeds of good and ill—
To see the headlong sway of force and sin,

And hold restrained the spirit's bitter hate,
Wailing the monarch's fruitless fate,
Hiding my face within my robe, and fain
Of tears, and chilled with frost of hidden pain.

ELECTRA

Handmaidens, orderers of the palace-halls,
Since at my side ye come, a suppliant train,
Companions of this offering, counsel me
As best befits the time: for I, who pour
Upon the grave these streams funereal,
With what fair word can I invoke my sire?
Shall I aver, *Behold, I bear these gifts*
From well-loved wife unto her well-loved lord,
When 'tis from her, my mother, that they come?
I dare not say it: of all words I fail
Wherewith to consecrate unto my sire
These sacrificial honours on his grave.
Or shall I speak this word, as mortals use—
Give back, to those who send these coronals,
Full recompense—of ills for acts malign?
Or shall I pour this draught for Earth to drink,
Sans word or reverence, as my sire was slain,
And homeward pass with unreverted eyes,
Casting the bowl away, as one who flings
The household cleansings to the common road?
Be art and part, O friends, in this my doubt,
Even as ye are in that one common hate
Whereby we live attended: fear ye not
The wrath of any man, nor hide your word
Within your breast: the day of death and doom
Awaits alike the freeman and the slave.
Speak, then, if aught thou know'st to aid us more.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou biddest; I will speak my soul's thought out,
Revering as a shrine thy father's grave.

ELECTRA

Say then thy say, as thou his tomb reverest.

LEADER

Speak solemn words to them that love, and pour.

ELECTRA
And of his kin whom dare I name as kind?

LEADER
Thyself; and next, whoe'er Aegisthus scorns.

ELECTRA
Then 'tis myself and thou, my prayer must name.

LEADER
Whoe'er they be, 'tis thine to know and name them.

ELECTRA
Is there no other we may claim as ours?

LEADER
Think of Orestes, though far-off he be.

ELECTRA
Right well in this too hast thou schooled my thought.

LEADER
Mindfully, next, on those who shed the blood—

ELECTRA
Pray on them what? expound, instruct my doubt.

LEADER
This: *Upon them some god or mortal come—*

ELECTRA
As judge or as avenger? speak thy thought.

LEADER
Pray in set terms, *Who shall the slayer slay.*

ELECTRA
Beseemeth it to ask such boon of heaven?

LEADER
How not, to wreak a wrong upon a foe?

ELECTRA (*praying at the tomb*)
O mighty Hermes, warder of the shades,
Herald of upper and of under world,
Proclaim and usher down my prayer's appeal
Unto the gods below, that they with eyes
Watchful behold these halls, my sire's of old—

And unto Earth, the mother of all things,
And foster-nurse, and womb that takes their seed.

Lo, I that pour these draughts for men now dead,
Call on my father, who yet holds in ruth
Me and mine own Orestes, *Father, speak—*
How shall thy children rule thine halls again?
Homeless we are and sold; and she who sold
Is she who bore us; and the price she took
Is he who joined with her to work thy death,
Aegisthus, her new lord. Behold me here
Brought down to slave's estate, and far away
Wanders Orestes, banished from the wealth
That once was thine, the profit of thy care,
Whereon these revel in a shameful joy.
Father, my prayer is said; 'tis thine to hear—
Grant that some fair fate bring Orestes home,
And unto me grant these—a purer soul
Than is my mother's, a more stainless hand.

These be my prayers for us; for thee, O sire,
I cry that one may come to smite thy foes,
And that the slayers may in turn be slain.
Cursed is their prayer, and thus I bar its path,
Praying mine own, a counter-curse on them.
And thou, send up to us the righteous boon
For which we pray; thine aids be heaven and earth,
And justice guide the right to victory.
(*To the* CHORUS)
Thus have I prayed, and thus I shed these streams,
And follow ye the wont, and as with flowers
Crown ye with many a tear and cry the dirge
Your lips ring out above the dead man's grave.
(*She pours the libations.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Woe, woe, woe!
Let the teardrop fall, plashing on the ground
Where our lord lies low:
Fall and cleanse away the cursed libation's stain,
Shed on this grave-mound,
Fenced wherein together, gifts of good or bane
From the dead are found.

Lord of Argos, hearken!
Though around thee darken
Mist of death and hell, arise and hear!
Hearken and awaken to our cry of woe!
Who with might of spear
Shall our home deliver?
Who like Ares bend until it quiver,
Bend the northern bow?
Who with hand upon the hilt himself will thrust with glaive,
Thrust and slay and save?

ELECTRA

Lo! the earth drinks them, to my sire they pass—
(*She notices the locks of* ORESTES.)
Learn ye with me of this thing new and strange.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Speak thou; my breast doth palpitate with fear.

ELECTRA

I see upon the tomb a curl new shorn.

LEADER

Shorn from what man or what deep-girded maid?

ELECTRA

That may he guess who will; the sign is plain.

LEADER

Let me learn this of thee; let youth prompt age.

ELECTRA

None is there here but I, to clip such gift.

LEADER

For they who thus should mourn him hate him sore.

ELECTRA

And lo! in truth the hair exceeding like—

LEADER

Like to what locks and whose? instruct me that.

ELECTRA

Like unto those my father's children wear.

LEADER

Then is this lock Orestes' secret gift?

ELECTRA

Most like it is unto the curls he wore.

LEADER

Yet how dared he to come unto his home?

ELECTRA

He hath but sent it, clipt to mourn his sire.

LEADER

It is a sorrow grievous as his death,
That he should live yet never dare return.

ELECTRA

Yea, and my heart o'erflows with gall of grief,
And I am pierced as with a cleaving dart;
Like to the first drops after drought, my tears
Fall down at will, a bitter bursting tide,
As on this lock I gaze; I cannot deem
That any Argive save Orestes' self
Was ever lord thereof; nor, well I wot,
Hath she, the murd'ress, shorn and laid this lock
To mourn him whom she slew—my mother she,
Bearing no mother's heart, but to her race
A loathing spirit, loathed itself of heaven!
Yet to affirm, as utterly made sure,
That this adornment cometh of the hand
Of mine Orestes, brother of my soul,
I may not venture, yet hope flatters fair!
Ah well-a-day, that this dumb hair had voice
To glad mine ears, as might a messenger,
Bidding me sway no more 'twixt fear and hope,
Clearly commanding, *Cast me hence away,*
Clipped was I from some head thou lovest not;
Or, *I am kin to thee, and here, as thou,*
I come to weep and deck our father's grave.
Aid me, ye gods! for well indeed ye know
How in the gale and counter-gale of doubt,
Like to the seaman's bark, we whirl and stray.
But, if God will our life, how strong shall spring,
From seed how small, the new tree of our home!—
Lo ye, a second sign—these footsteps, look,—

Like to my own, a corresponsive print;
And look, another footmark,—this his own,
And that the foot of one who walked with him.
Mark, how the heel and tendons' print combine,
Measured exact, with mine coincident!
Alas, for doubt and anguish rack my mind.
(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter suddenly.*)

ORESTES
Pray thou, in gratitude for prayers fulfilled,
Fair fall the rest of what I ask of heaven.

ELECTRA
Wherefore? what win I from the gods by prayer?

ORESTES
This, that thine eyes behold thy heart's desire.

ELECTRA
On whom of mortals know'st thou that I call?

ORESTES
I know thy yearning for Orestes deep.

ELECTRA
Say then, wherein event hath crowned my prayer?

ORESTES
I, I am he; seek not one more akin.

ELECTRA
Some fraud, O stranger, weavest thou for me?

ORESTES
Against myself I weave it, if I weave.

ELECTRA
Ah, thou hast mind to mock me in my woe!

ORESTES
'Tis at mine own I mock then, mocking thine.

ELECTRA
Speak I with thee then as Orestes' self?

ORESTES
My very face thou see'st and know'st me not,
And yet but now, when thou didst see the lock

Shorn for my father's grave, and when thy quest
Was eager on the footprints I had made,
Even I, thy brother, shaped and sized as thou,
Fluttered thy spirit, as at sight of me!
Lay now this ringlet whence 'twas shorn, and judge,
And look upon this robe, thine own hands' work,
The shuttle-prints, the creature wrought thereon—
Refrain thyself, nor prudence lose in joy,
For well I wot, our kin are less than kind.

ELECTRA

O thou that art unto our father's home
Love, grief and hope, for thee the tears ran down,
For thee, the son, the saviour that should be;
Trust thou thine arm and win thy father's halls!
O aspect sweet of fourfold love to me,
Whom upon thee the heart's constraint bids call
As on my father, and the claim of love
From me unto my mother turns to thee,
For she is very hate; to thee too turns
What of my heart went out to her who died
A ruthless death upon the altar-stone;
And for myself I love thee—thee that wast
A brother leal, sole stay of love to me.
Now by thy side be strength and right, and Zeus
Saviour almighty, stand to aid the twain!

ORESTES

Zeus, Zeus! look down on our estate and us,
The orphaned brood of him, our eagle-sire,
Whom to his death a fearful serpent brought,
Enwinding him in coils; and we, bereft
And foodless, sink with famine, all too weak
To bear unto the eyrie, as he bore,
Such quarry as he slew. Lo! I and she,
Electra, stand before thee, fatherless,
And each alike cast out and homeless made.

ELECTRA

And if thou leave to death the brood of him
Whose altar blazed for thee, whose reverence
Was thine, all thine,—whence, in the after years,
Shall any hand like his adorn thy shrine
With sacrifice of flesh? the eaglets slain,

Thou wouldst not have a messenger to bear
Thine omens, once so clear, to mortal men;
So, if this kingly stock be withered all,
None on high festivals will fend thy shrine.
Stoop thou to raise us! strong the race shall grow,
Though puny now it seem, and fallen low.

LEADER

O children, saviours of your father's home,
Beware ye of your words, lest one should hear
And bear them, for the tongue hath lust to tell,
Unto our masters—whom God grant to me
In pitchy reek of fun'ral flame to see!

ORESTES

Nay, mighty is Apollo's oracle
And shall not fail me, whom it bade to pass
Thro' all this peril; clear the voice rang out
With many warnings, sternly threatening
To my hot heart the wintry chill of pain,
Unless upon the slayers of my sire
I pressed for vengeance: this the god's command—
That I, in ire for home and wealth despoiled,
Should with a craft like theirs the slayers slay:
Else with my very life I should atone
This deed undone, in many a ghastly wise.
For he proclaimed unto the ears of men
That offerings, poured to angry powers of death,
Exude again, unless their will be done,
As grim disease on those that poured them forth—
As leprous ulcers mounting on the flesh
And with fell fangs corroding what of old
Wore natural form; and on the brow arise
White poisoned hairs, the crown of this disease.
He spake moreover of assailing fiends
Empowered to quit on me my father's blood,
Wreaking their wrath on me, what time in night
Beneath shut lids the spirit's eye sees clear.
The dart that flies in darkness, sped from hell
By spirits of the murdered dead who call
Unto their kin for vengeance, formless fear,
The night-tide's visitant, and madness' curse
Should drive and rack me; and my tortured frame
Should be chased forth from man's community

As with the brazen scorpions of the scourge.
For me and such as me no lustral bowl
Should stand, no spilth of wine be poured to God
For me, and wrath unseen of my dead sire
Should drive me from the shrine; no man should dare
To take me to his hearth, nor dwell with me:
Slow, friendless, cursed of all should be mine end,
And pitiless horror wind me for the grave.
This spake the god—this dare I disobey?
Yea, though I dared, the deed must yet be done;
For to that end diverse desires combine,—
The god's behest, deep grief for him who died,
And last, the grievous blank of wealth despoiled—
All these weigh on me, urge that Argive men,
Minions of valour, who with soul of fire
Did make of fencèd Troy a ruinous heap,
Be not left slaves to two and each a woman!
For he, the man, wears woman's heart; if not,
Soon shall he know, confronted by a man.

(ORESTES, ELECTRA, *and the* CHORUS *gather round the tomb of Agamemnon. The following lines are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Mighty Fates, on you we call!
Bid the will of Zeus ordain
Power to those, to whom again
Justice turns with hand and aid!
Grievous was the prayer one made—
Grievous let the answer fall!
Where the mighty doom is set,
Justice claims aloud her debt.
Who in blood hath dipped the steel,
Deep in blood her meed shall feel!
List an immemorial word—
Whosoe'er shall take the sword
Shall perish by the sword.

ORESTES

Father, unblest in death, O father mine!
What breath of word or deed
Can I waft on thee from this far confine
Unto thy lowly bed,—
Waft upon thee, in midst of darkness lying,

Hope's counter-gleam of fire?
Yet the loud dirge of praise brings grace undying
Unto each parted sire.

CHORUS

O child, the spirit of the dead,
Altho' upon his flesh have fed
The grim teeth of the flame,
Is quelled not; after many days
The sting of wrath his soul shall raise,
A vengeance to reclaim!
To the dead rings loud our cry—
Plain the living's treachery—
Swelling, shrilling, urged on high,
The vengeful dirge, for parents slain,
Shall strive and shall attain.

ELECTRA

Hear me too, even me, O father, hear!
Not by one child alone these groans, these tears are shed
Upon thy sepulchre.
Each, each, where thou art lowly laid,
Stands, a suppliant, homeless made:
Ah, and all is full of ill,
Comfort is there none to say!
Strive and wrestle as we may,
Still stands doom invincible.

CHORUS

Nay, if so he will, the god
Still our tears to joy can turn.
He can bid a triumph-ode
Drown the dirge beside this urn;
He to kingly halls can greet
The child restored, the homeward-guided feet.

ORESTES

Ah my father! hadst thou lain
Under Ilion's wall,
By some Lycian spearman slain,
Thou hadst left in this thine hall
Honour; thou hadst wrought for us
Fame and life most glorious.
Over-seas if thou hadst died,

Heavily had stood thy tomb,
Heaped on high; but, quenched in pride,
Grief were light unto thy home.

CHORUS

Loved and honoured hadst thou lain
By the dead that nobly fell,
In the under-world again,
Where are throned the kings of hell,
Full of sway, adorable
Thou hadst stood at their right hand—
Thou that wert, in mortal land,
By Fate's ordinance and law,
King of kings who bear the crown
And the staff, to which in awe
Mortal men bow down.

ELECTRA

Nay, O father, I were fain
Other fate had fallen on thee.
Ill it were if thou hadst lain
One among the common slain,
Fallen by Scamander's side—
Those who slew thee there should be!
Then, untouched by slavery,
We had heard as from afar
Deaths of those who should have died
'Mid the chance of war.

CHORUS

O child, forbear! things all too high thou sayest.
Easy, but vain, thy cry!
A boon above all gold is that thou prayest,
An unreached destiny,
As of the blessèd land that far aloof
Beyond the north wind lies;
Yet doth your double prayer ring loud reproof;
A double scourge of sighs
Awakes the dead; th' avengers rise, though late;
Blood stains the guilty pride
Of the accursed who rule on earth, and Fate
Stands on the children's side.

ELECTRA

That hath sped thro' mine ear, like a shaft from a bow!
Zeus, Zeus! it is thou who dost send from below
A doom on the desperate doer—ere long
On a mother a father shall visit his wrong.

CHORUS

Be it mine to upraise thro' the reek of the pyre
The chant of delight, while the funeral fire
Devoureth the corpse of a man that is slain
And a woman laid low!
For who bids me conceal it! out-rending control,
Blows ever the stern blast of hate thro' my soul,
And before me a vision of wrath and of bane
Flits and waves to and fro.

ORESTES

Zeus, thou alone to us art parent now.
Smite with a rending blow
Upon their heads, and bid the land be well:
Set right where wrong hath stood; and thou give ear,
O Earth, unto my prayer—
Yea, hear O mother Earth, and monarchy of hell!

CHORUS

Nay, the law is sternly set—
Blood-drops shed upon the ground
Plead for other bloodshed yet;
Loud the call of death doth sound,
Calling guilt of olden time,
A Fury, crowning crime with crime.

ELECTRA

Where, where are ye, avenging powers,
Puissant Furies of the slain?
Behold the relics of the race
Of Atreus, thrust from pride of place!
O Zeus, what home henceforth is ours,
What refuge to attain?

CHORUS

Lo, at your wail my heart throbs, wildly stirred;
Now am I lorn with sadness,
Darkened in all my soul, to hear your sorrow's word.

Anon to hope, the seat of strength, I rise,—
She, thrusting grief away, lifts up mine eyes
To the new dawn of gladness.

ORESTES

Skills it to tell of aught save wrong on wrong,
Wrought by our mother's deed?
Though now she fawn for pardon, sternly strong
Standeth our wrath, and will nor hear nor heed.
Her children's soul is wolfish, born from hers,
And softens not by prayers.

CHORUS

I dealt upon my breast the blow
That Asian mourning women know;
Wails from my breast the fun'ral cry,
The Cissian weeping melody;
Stretched rendingly forth, to tatter and tear,
My clenched hands wander, here and there,
From head to breast; distraught with blows
Throb dizzily my brows.

ELECTRA

Aweless in hate, O mother, sternly brave!
As in a foeman's grave
Thou laid'st in earth a king, but to the bier
No citizen drew near,—
Thy husband, thine, yet for his obsequies,
Thou bad'st no wail arise!

ORESTES

Alas, the shameful burial thou dost speak!
Yet I the vengeance of his shame will wreak—
That do the gods command!
That shall achieve mine hand!
Grant me to thrust her life away, and I
Will dare to die!

CHORUS

List thou the deed! Hewn down and foully torn,
He to the tomb was borne;
Yea, by her hand, the deed who wrought,
With like dishonour to the grave was brought,
And by her hand she strove, with strong desire,
Thy life to crush, O child, by murder of thy sire:

Bethink thee, hearing, of the shame, the pain
Wherewith that sire was slain!

ELECTRA

Yea, such was the doom of my sire; well-a-day,
I was thrust from his side,—
As a dog from the chamber they thrust me away,
And in place of my laughter rose sobbing and tears,
As in darkness I lay.
O father, if this word can pass to thine ears,
To thy soul let it reach and abide!

CHORUS

Let it pass, let it pierce, through the sense of thine ear,
To thy soul, where in silence it waiteth the hour!
The past is accomplished; but rouse thee to hear
What the future prepareth; awake and appear,
Our champion, in wrath and in power!

ORESTES

O father, to thy loved ones come in aid.

ELECTRA

With tears I call on thee.

CHORUS

Listen and rise to light!
Be thou with us, be thou against the foe!
Swiftly this cry arises—even so
Pray we, the loyal band, as we have prayed!

ORESTES

Let their might meet with mine, and their right with my right.

ELECTRA

O ye Gods, it is yours to decree.

CHORUS

Ye call unto the dead; I quake to hear.
Fate is ordained of old, and shall fulfil your prayer.

ELECTRA

Alas, the inborn curse that haunts our home,
Of Atè's bloodstained scourge the tuneless sound!
Alas, the deep insufferable doom,
The stanchless wound!

ORESTES

It shall be stanched, the task is ours,—
Not by a stranger's, but by kindred hand,
Shall be chased forth the blood-fiend of our land.
Be this our spoken spell, to call Earth's nether powers!

CHORUS

Lords of a dark eternity,
To you has come the children's cry,
Send up from hell, fulfil your aid
To them who prayed.
(*The chant is concluded.*)

ORESTES

O father, murdered in unkingly wise,
Fulfil my prayer, grant me thine halls to sway.

ELECTRA

To me, too, grant this boon—dark death to deal
Unto Aegisthus, and to 'scape my doom.

ORESTES

So shall the rightful feasts that mortals pay
Be set for thee; else, not for thee shall rise
The scented reek of altars fed with flesh,
But thou shalt lie dishonoured: hear thou me!

ELECTRA

I too, from my full heritage restored,
Will pour the lustral streams, what time I pass
Forth as a bride from these paternal halls,
And honour first, beyond all graves, thy tomb.

ORESTES

Earth, send my sire to fend me in the fight!

ELECTRA

Give fair-faced fortune, O Persephone!

ORESTES

Bethink thee, father, in the laver slain—

ELECTRA

Bethink thee of the net they handselled for thee!

ORESTES

Bonds not of brass ensnared thee, father mine.

ELECTRA

Yea, the ill craft of an enfolding robe.

ORESTES

By this our bitter speech arise, O sire!

ELECTRA

Raise thou thine head at love's last, dearest call!

ORESTES

Yea, speed forth Right to aid thy kinsmen's cause;
Grip for grip, let them grasp the foe, if thou
Willest in triumph to forget thy fall.

ELECTRA

Hear me, O father, once again hear me.
Lo! at thy tomb, two fledglings of thy brood—
A man-child and a maid; hold them in ruth,
Nor wipe them out, the last of Pelops' line.
For while they live, thou livest from the dead;
Children are memory's voices, and preserve
The dead from wholly dying: as a net
Is ever by the buoyant corks upheld,
Which save the flax-mesh, in the depth submerged.
Listen, this wail of ours doth rise for thee,
And as thou heedest it thyself art saved.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In sooth, a blameless prayer ye spake at length—
The tomb's requital for its dirge denied:
Now, for the rest, as thou art fixed to do,
Take fortune by the hand and work thy will.

ORESTES

The doom is set; and yet I fain would ask—
Not swerving from the course of my resolve,—
Wherefore she sent these offerings, and why
She softens all too late her cureless deed?
An idle boon it was, to send them here
Unto the dead who recks not of such gifts.
I cannot guess her thought, but well I ween
Such gifts are skilless to atone such crime.

Be blood once spilled, an idle strife he strives
Who seeks with other wealth or wine outpoured
To atone the deed. So stands the word, nor fails.
Yet would I know her thought; speak, if thou knowest.

LEADER

I know it, son; for at her side I stood.
'Twas the night-wandering terror of a dream
That flung her shivering from her couch, and bade her—
Her, the accursed of God—these offerings send.

ORESTES

Heard ye the dream, to tell it forth aright?

LEADER

Yea, from herself; her womb a serpent bare.

ORESTES

What then the sum and issue of the tale?

LEADER

Even as a swaddled child, she lull'd the thing.

ORESTES

What suckling craved the creature, born full-fanged?

LEADER

Yet in her dreams she proffered it the breast.

ORESTES

How? did the hateful thing not bite her teat?

LEADER

Yea, and sucked forth a blood-gout in the milk.

ORESTES

Not vain this dream—it bodes a man's revenge.

LEADER

Then out of sleep she started with a cry,
And thro' the palace for their mistress' aid
Full many lamps, that erst lay blind with night,
Flared into light; then, even as mourners use,
She sends these offerings, in hope to win
A cure to cleave and sunder sin from doom.

ORESTES

Earth and my father's grave, to you I call—
Give this her dream fulfilment, and thro' me.
I read it in each part coincident
With what shall be; for mark, that serpent sprang
From the same womb as I, in swaddling bands
By the same hands was swathed, lipped the same breast,
And sucking forth the same sweet mother's-milk
Infused a clot of blood; and in alarm
She cried upon her wound the cry of pain.
The rede is clear: the thing of dread she nursed,
The death of blood she dies; and I, 'tis I,
In semblance of a serpent, that must slay her.
Thou art my seer, and thus I read the dream.

LEADER

So do; yet ere thou doest, speak to us,
Bidding some act, some, by not acting, aid.

ORESTES

Brief my command: I bid my sister pass
In silence to the house, and all I bid
This my design with wariness conceal,
That they who did by craft a chieftain slay
May by like craft and in like noose be ta'en,
Dying the death which Loxias foretold—
Apollo, king and prophet undisproved.
I with this warrior Pylades will come
In likeness of a stranger, full equipt
As travellers come, and at the palace gates
Will stand, as stranger yet in friendship's bond
Unto this house allied; and each of us
Will speak the tongue that round Parnassus sounds,
Feigning such speech as Phocian voices use.
And what if none of those that tend the gates
Shall welcome us with gladness, since the house
With ills divine is haunted? If this hap,
We at the gate will bide, till, passing by,
Some townsman make conjecture and proclaim,
How? is Aegisthus here, and knowingly
Keeps suppliants aloof, by bolt and bar?
Then shall I win my way; and if I cross
The threshold of the gate, the palace' guard,
And find him throned where once my father sat—

Or if he come anon, and face to face
Confronting, drop his eyes from mine—I swear
He shall not utter, *Who art thou and whence?*
Ere my steel leap, and compassed round with death
Low he shall lie: and thus, full-fed with doom,
The Fury of the house shall drain once more
A deep third draught of rich unmingled blood.
But thou, O sister, look that all within
Be well prepared to give these things event.
And ye—I say 'twere well to bear a tongue
Full of fair silence and of fitting speech
As each beseems the time; and last, do thou,
Hermes the warder-god, keep watch and ward,
And guide to victory my striving sword.
(ORESTES, PYLADES, *and* ELECTRA *depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Many and marvellous the things of fear
Earth's breast doth bear;
And the sea's lap with many monsters teems,
And windy levin-bolts and meteor gleams
Breed many deadly things—
Unknown and flying forms, with fear upon their wings,
And in their tread is death;
And rushing whirlwinds, of whose blasting breath
Man's tongue can tell.

antistrophe 1

But who can tell aright the fiercer thing,
The aweless soul, within man's breast inhabiting?
Who tell, how, passion-fraught and love-distraught,
The woman's eager, craving thought
Doth wed mankind to woe and ruin fell?
Yea, how the loveless love that doth possess
The woman, even as the lioness,
Doth rend and wrest apart, with eager strife,
The link of wedded life?

strophe 2

Let him be the witness, whose thought is not borne on light wings thro' the air,
But abideth with knowledge, what thing was wrought by Althea's despair;

For she marr'd the life-grace of her son, with ill counsel rekindled the flame
That was quenched as it glowed on the brand, what time from his mother he came,
With the cry of a new-born child; and the brand from the burning she won,
For the Fates had foretold it coeval, in life and in death, with her son.

antistrophe 2

Yea, and man's hate tells of another, even Scylla of murderous guile,
Who slew for an enemy's sake her father, won o'er by the wile
And the gifts of Cretan Minos, the gauds of the high-wrought gold;
For she clipped from her father's head the lock that should never wax old,
As he breathed in the silence of sleep, and knew not her craft and her crime—
But Hermes, the guard of the dead, doth grasp her, in fulness of time.

strophe 3

And since of the crimes of the cruel I tell, let my singing record
The bitter wedlock and loveless, the curse on these halls outpoured,
The crafty device of a woman, whereby did a chieftain fall,
A warrior stern in his wrath, the fear of his enemies all,—
A song of dishonour, untimely! and cold is the hearth that was warm,
And ruled by the cowardly spear, the woman's unwomanly arm.

antistrophe 3

But the summit and crown of all crimes is that which in Lemnos befell;
A woe and a mourning it is, a shame and a spitting to tell;
And he that in after time doth speak of his deadliest thought,
Doth say, *It is like to the deed that of old time in Lemnos was wrought;*
And loathed of men were the doers, and perished, they and their seed,
For the gods brought hate upon them; none loveth the impious deed.

strophe 4

It is well of these tales to tell; for the sword in the grasp of Right
With a cleaving, a piercing blow to the innermost heart doth smite,
And the deed unlawfully done is not trodden down nor forgot,
When the sinner out-steppeth the law and heedeth the high God not;

antistrophe 4

But Justice hath planted the anvil, and Destiny forgeth the sword
That shall smite in her chosen time; by her is the child restored;
And, darkly devising, the Fiend of the house, world-cursed, will repay
The price of the blood of the slain, that was shed in the bygone day.

(*The scene now is before the palace.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter, still dressed as travellers.*)

ORESTES *(knocking at the palace gate)*
What ho! slave, ho! I smite the palace gate
In vain, it seems; what ho, attend within,—
Once more, attend; come forth and ope the halls,
If yet Aegisthus holds them hospitable.

SLAVE *(from within)*
Anon, anon! (*Opens the door*)
Speak, from what land art thou, and sent from whom?

ORESTES
Go, tell to them who rule the palace-halls,
Since 'tis to them I come with tidings new—
(Delay not—Night's dark car is speeding on,
And time is now for wayfarers to cast
Anchor in haven, wheresoe'er a house
Doth welcome strangers)—that there now come forth
Some one who holds authority within—
The queen, or, if some man, more seemly were it;
For when man standeth face to face with man,
No stammering modesty confounds their speech,
But each to each doth tell his meaning clear.
(CLYTEMNESTRA *comes out of the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA
Speak on, O strangers: have ye need of aught?
Here is whate'er beseems a house like this—
Warm bath and bed, tired Nature's soft restorer,
And courteous eyes to greet you; and if aught
Of graver import needeth act as well,
That, as man's charge, I to a man will tell.

ORESTES
A Daulian man am I, from Phocis bound,
And as with mine own travel-scrip self-laden
I went toward Argos, parting hitherward
With travelling foot, there did encounter me
One whom I knew not and who knew not me,
But asked my purposed way nor hid his own,
And, as we talked together, told his name—
Strophius of Phocis; then he said, "Good sir,

Since in all case thou art to Argos bound,
Forget not this my message, heed it well,
Tell to his own, *Orestes is no more.*
And—whatsoe'er his kinsfolk shall resolve,
Whether to bear his dust unto his home,
Or lay him here, in death as erst in life
Exiled for aye, a child of banishment—
Bring me their hest, upon thy backward road;
For now in brazen compass of an urn
His ashes lie, their dues of weeping paid."
So much I heard, and so much tell to thee,
Not knowing if I speak unto his kin
Who rule his home; but well, I deem, it were,
Such news should earliest reach a parent's ear.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Ah woe is me! thy word our ruin tells;
From roof-tree unto base are we despoiled.—
O thou whom nevermore we wrestle down,
Thou Fury of this home, how oft and oft
Thou dost descry what far aloof is laid,
Yea, from afar dost bend th' unerring bow
And rendest from my wretchedness its friends;
As now Orestes—who, a brief while since,
Safe from the mire of death stood warily,—
Was the home's hope to cure th' exulting wrong;
Now thou ordainest, *Let the ill abide.*

ORESTES

To host and hostess thus with fortune blest,
Lief had I come with better news to bear
Unto your greeting and acquaintanceship;
For what goodwill lies deeper than the bond
Of guest and host? and wrong abhorred it were,
As well I deem, if I, who pledged my faith
To one, and greetings from the other had,
Bore not aright the tidings 'twixt the twain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Whate'er thy news, thou shalt not welcome lack,
Meet and deserved, nor scant our grace shall be.
Hadst thou thyself not come, such tale to tell,
Another, sure, had borne it to our ears.
But lo! the hour is here when travelling guests,

Fresh from the daylong labour of the road,
Should win their rightful due. (*To the slave*)
Take him within
To the man-chamber's hospitable rest—
Him and these fellow-farers at his side;
Give them such guest-right as beseems our halls;
I bid thee do as thou shalt answer for it.
And I unto the prince who rules our home
Will tell the tale, and, since we lack not friends,
With them will counsel how this hap to bear.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *goes back into the palace.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *are conducted to the guest quarters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
So be it done—
Sister-servants, when draws nigh
Time for us aloud to cry
Orestes and his victory?

O holy earth and holy tomb
Over the grave-pit heaped on high,
Where low doth Agamemnon lie,
The king of ships, the army's lord!
Now is the hour—give ear and come,
For now doth Craft her aid afford,
And Hermes, guard of shades in hell,
Stands o'er their strife, to sentinel
The dooming of the sword.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
I wot the stranger worketh woe within—
For lo! I see come forth, suffused with tears,
Orestes' nurse. (*The* NURSE *enters from the palace.*)
What ho, Kilissa—thou
Beyond the doors? Where goest thou? Methinks
Some grief unbidden walketh at thy side.

NURSE
My mistress bids me, with what speed I may,
Call in Aegisthus to the stranger guests,
That he may come, and standing face to face,
A man with men, may thus more clearly learn
This rumour new. Thus speaking, to her slaves

She hid beneath the glance of fictive grief
Laughter for what is wrought—to her desire
Too well; but ill, ill, ill besets the house,
Brought by the tale these guests have told so clear.
And he, God wot, will gladden all his heart
Hearing this rumour. Woe and well-a-day!
The bitter mingled cup of ancient woes,
Hard to be borne, that here in Atreus' house
Befel, was grievous to mine inmost heart,
But never yet did I endure such pain.
All else I bore with set soul patiently;
But now—alack, alack!—Orestes dear,
The day and night-long travail of my soul!
Whom from his mother's womb, a new-born child,
I clasped and cherished! Many a time and oft
Toilsome and profitless my service was,
When his shrill outcry called me from my couch!
For the young child, before the sense is born,
Hath but a dumb thing's life, must needs be nursed
As its own nature bids. The swaddled thing
Hath nought of speech, whate'er discomfort come—
Hunger or thirst or lower weakling need,—
For the babe's stomach works its own relief.
Which knowing well before, yet oft surprised,
'Twas mine to cleanse the swaddling clothes—poor I
Was nurse to tend and fuller to make white:
Two works in one, two handicrafts I took,
When in mine arms the father laid the boy.
And now he's dead—alack and well-a-day!
Yet must I go to him whose wrongful power
Pollutes this house—fair tidings these to him!

LEADER

Say then, with what array she bids him come?

NURSE

What say'st thou! Speak more clearly for mine ear.

LEADER

Bids she bring henchmen, or to come alone?

NURSE

She bids him bring a spear-armed body-guard.

LEADER

Nay, tell not that unto our loathèd lord,
But speed to him, put on the mien of joy,
Say, *Come alone, fear nought, the news is good:*
A bearer can tell straight a twisted tale.

NURSE

Does then thy mind in this new tale find joy?

LEADER

What if Zeus bid our ill wind veer to fair?

NURSE

And how? the home's hope with Orestes dies.

LEADER

Not yet—a seer, though feeble, this might see.

NURSE

What say'st thou? Know'st thou aught, this tale belying?

LEADER

Go, tell the news to him, perform thine hest,—
What the gods will, themselves can well provide.

NURSE

Well, I will go, herein obeying thee;
And luck fall fair, with favour sent from heaven.

(*She goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Zeus, sire of them who on Olympus dwell,
Hear thou, O hear my prayer!
Grant to my rightful lords to prosper well
Even as their zeal is fair!
For right, for right goes up aloud my cry—
Zeus, aid him, stand anigh!

refrain 1

Into his father's hall he goes
To smite his father's foes.
Bid him prevail! by thee on throne of triumph set,
Twice, yea and thrice with joy shall he acquit the debt.

antistrophe 1

Bethink thee, the young steed, the orphan foal
Of sire beloved by thee, unto the car
Of doom is harnessed fast.
Guide him aright, plant firm a lasting goal,
Speed thou his pace,—O that no chance may mar
The homeward course, the last!

strophe 2

And ye who dwell within the inner chamber
Where shines the storèd joy of gold—
Gods of one heart, O hear ye, and remember;
Up and avenge the blood shed forth of old,
With sudden rightful blow;
Then let the old curse die, nor be renewed
With progeny of blood,—
Once more, and not again, be latter guilt laid low!

refrain 2

O thou who dwell'st in Delphi's mighty cave,
Grant us to see this home once more restored
Unto its rightful lord!
Let it look forth, from veils of death, with joyous eye
Unto the dawning light of liberty;

antistrophe 2

And Hermes, Maia's child, lend hand to save,
Willing the right, and guide
Our state with Fortune's breeze adown the favouring tide.
Whate'er in darkness hidden lies,
He utters at his will;
He at his will throws darkness on our eyes,
By night and eke by day inscrutable.

strophe 3

Then, then shall wealth atone
The ills that here were done.
Then, then will we unbind,
Fling free on wafting wind
Of joy, the woman's voice that waileth now
In piercing accents for a chief laid low;

refrain 3

And this our song shall be—
Hail to the commonwealth restored!

Hail to the freedom won to me!
All hail! for doom hath passed from him, my well-loved lord!

antistrophe 3

And thou, O child, when Time and Chance agree,
Up to the deed that for thy sire is done!
And if she wail unto thee, *Spare, O son*—
Cry, *Aid, O father*—and achieve the deed,
The horror of man's tongue, the gods' great need!
Hold in thy breast such heart as Perseus had,
The bitter woe work forth,
Appease the summons of the dead,
The wrath of friends on earth;
Yea, set within a sign of blood and doom,
And do to utter death him that pollutes thy home.

(AEGISTHUS *enters alone.*)

AEGISTHUS

Hither and not unsummoned have I come;
For a new rumour, borne by stranger men
Arriving hither, hath attained mine ears,
Of hap unwished-for, even Orestes' death.
This were new sorrow, a blood-bolter'd load
Laid on the house that doth already bow
Beneath a former wound that festers deep.
Dare I opine these words have truth and life?
Or are they tales, of woman's terror born,
That fly in the void air, and die disproved?
Canst thou tell aught, and prove it to my soul?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What we have heard, we heard; go thou within
Thyself to ask the strangers of their tale.
Strengthless are tidings, thro' another heard;
Question is his, to whom the tale is brought.

AEGISTHUS

I too will meet and test the messenger,
Whether himself stood witness of the death,
Or tells it merely from dim rumour learnt:
None shall cheat me, whose soul hath watchful eyes.

(*He goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Zeus, Zeus! what word to me is given?
What cry or prayer, invoking heaven,
Shall first by me be utterèd?
What speech of craft—nor all revealing,
Nor all too warily concealing—
Ending my speech, shall aid the deed?
For lo! in readiness is laid
The dark emprise, the rending blade;
Blood-dropping daggers shall achieve
The dateless doom of Atreus' name,
Or—kindling torch and joyful flame
In sign of new-won liberty—
Once more Orestes shall retrieve
His father's wealth, and, throned on high,
Shall hold the city's fealty.
So mighty is the grasp whereby,
Heaven-holpen, he shall trip and throw,
Unseconded, a double foe.
Ho for the victory!

(*A loud cry is heard within.*)

VOICE OF AEGISTHUS

Help, help, alas!

CHORUS

Ho there, ho! how is't within?
Is't done? is't over? Stand we here aloof
While it is wrought, that guiltless we may seem
Of this dark deed; with death is strife fulfilled.

(*An* ATTENDANT *enters from the palace.*)

ATTENDANT

O woe, O woe, my lord is done to death!
Woe, woe, and woe again, Aegisthus gone!
Hasten, fling wide the doors, unloose the bolts
Of the queen's chamber. O for some young strength
To match the need! but aid availeth nought
To him laid low for ever. Help, help, help!
Sure to deaf ears I shout, and call in vain
To slumber ineffectual. What ho!
The queen! how fareth Clytemnestra's self?
Her neck too, hers, is close upon the steel,
And soon shall sing, hewn thro' as justice wills.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA
What ails thee, raising this ado for us?

ATTENDANT
I say the dead are come to slay the living.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Alack, I read thy riddles all too clear—
We slew by craft and by like craft shall die.
Swift, bring the axe that slew my lord of old;
I'll know anon or death or victory—
So stands the curse, so I confront it here.

(ORESTES *rushes from the palace; his sword dripping with blood.* PYLADES *is with him.*)

ORESTES
Thee too I seek: for him what's done will serve.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Woe, woe! Aegisthus, spouse and champion, slain!

ORESTES
What, lov'st the man? then in his grave lie down,
Be his in death, desert him nevermore!

CLYTEMNESTRA
Stay, child, and fear to strike. O son, this breast
Pillowed thine head full oft, while, drowsed with sleep,
Thy toothless mouth drew mother's milk from me.

ORESTES
Can I my mother spare? speak, Pylades.

PYLADES
Where then would fall the hest Apollo gave
At Delphi, where the solemn compact sworn?
Choose thou the hate of all men, not of gods.

ORESTES
Thou dost prevail; I hold thy counsel good.
(*To* CLYTEMNESTRA)
Follow; I will to slay thee at his side.
With him whom in his life thou lovedst more
Than Agamemnon, sleep in death, the meed
For hate where love, and love where hate was due!

CLYTEMNESTRA
I nursed thee young; must I forego mine eld?

ORESTES
Thou slew'st my father; shalt thou dwell with me?

CLYTEMNESTRA
Fate bore a share in these things, O my child!

ORESTES
Fate also doth provide this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Beware, O child, a parent's dying curse.

ORESTES
A parent who did cast me out to ill!

CLYTEMNESTRA
Not cast thee out, but to a friendly home.

ORESTES
Born free, I was by twofold bargain sold.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Where then the price that I received for thee?

ORESTES
The price of shame; I taunt thee not more plainly.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Nay, but recount thy father's lewdness too.

ORESTES
Home-keeping, chide not him who toils without.

CLYTEMNESTRA
'Tis hard for wives to live as widows, child.

ORESTES
The absent husband toils for them at home.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Thou growest fain to slay thy mother, child.

ORESTES
Nay, 'tis thyself wilt slay thyself, not I.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Beware thy mother's vengeful hounds from hell.

ORESTES
How shall I 'scape my father's, sparing thee?

CLYTEMNESTRA
Living, I cry as to a tomb, unheard.

ORESTES
My father's fate ordains this doom for thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA
Ah me! this snake it was I bore and nursed.

ORESTES
Ay, right prophetic was thy visioned fear.
Shameful thy deed was—die the death of shame!
(*He drives her into the house before him.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Lo, even for these I mourn, a double death:
Yet since Orestes, driven on by doom,
Thus crowns the height of murders manifold,
I say, 'tis well—that not in night and death
Should sink the eye and light of this our home.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

There came on Priam's race and name
A vengeance; though it tarried long,
With heavy doom it came.
Came, too, on Agamemnon's hall
A lion-pair, twin swordsmen strong.
And last, the heritage doth fall
To him, to whom from Pythian cave
The god his deepest counsel gave.

refrain 1

Cry out, rejoice! our kingly hall
Hath 'scaped from ruin—ne'er again
Its ancient wealth be wasted all
By two usurpers, sin-defiled—
An evil path of woe and bane!

antistrophe 1

On him who dealt the dastard blow
Comes Craft, Revenge's scheming child.
And hand in hand with him doth go,
Eager for fight,
The child of Zeus, whom men below
Call Justice, naming her aright.
And on her foes her breath
Is as the blast of death;

strophe 2

For her the god who dwells in deep recess
Beneath Parnassus' brow,
Summons with loud acclaim
To rise, though late and lame,
And come with craft that worketh righteousness.

For even o'er Powers divine this law is strong—
Thou shalt not serve the wrong.

refrain 2

To that which ruleth heaven beseems it that we bow
Lo, freedom's light hath come!
Lo, now is rent away
The grim and curbing bit that held us dumb.
Up to the light, ye halls! this many a day
Too low on earth ye lay.

antistrophe 2

And Time, the great Accomplisher,
Shall cross the threshold, whensoe'er
He choose with purging hand to cleanse
The palace, driving all pollution thence.
And fair the cast of Fortune's die
Before our state's new lords shall lie,
Not as of old, but bringing fairer doom.
Lo, freedom's light hath come!

(*The central doors of the palace open, disclosing* ORESTES *standing over the corpses of* AEGISTHUS *and* CLYTEMNESTRA; *in one hand he holds his sword, in the other the robe in which* AGAMEMNON *was entangled and slain.*)

ORESTES

There lies our country's twofold tyranny,
My father's slayers, spoilers of my home.
Erst were they royal, sitting on the throne,
And loving are they yet,—their common fate
Tells the tale truly, shows their trothplight firm.
They swore to work mine ill-starred father's death,
They swore to die together; 'tis fulfilled.
O ye who stand, this great doom's witnesses,
Behold this too, the dark device which bound
My sire unhappy to his death,—behold
The mesh which trapped his hands, enwound his feet!
Stand round, unfold it—'tis the trammel-net
That wrapped a chieftain; hold it that he see,
The father—not my sire, but he whose eye
Is judge of all things, the all-seeing Sun!
Let him behold my mother's damnèd deed,
Then let him stand, when need shall be to me,
Witness that justly I have sought and slain
My mother; blameless was Aegisthus' doom—
He died the death law bids adulterers die.
But she who plotted this accursèd thing
To slay her lord, by whom she bare beneath
Her girdle once the burden of her babes,
Beloved erewhile, now turned to hateful foes—
What deem ye of her? or what venomed thing,
Sea-snake or adder, had more power than she
To poison with a touch the flesh unscarred?
So great her daring, such her impious will.
How name her, if I may not speak a curse?
A lion-springe! a laver's swathing cloth,
Wrapping a dead man, twining round his feet—
A net, a trammel, an entangling robe?
Such were the weapon of some strangling thief,
The terror of the road, a cut-purse hound—
With such device full many might he kill,
Full oft exult in heat of villainy.
Ne'er have my house so cursed an indweller—
Heaven send me, rather, childless to be slain!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for each desperate deed!
Woe for the queen, with shame of life bereft!

And ah, for him who still is left,
Madness, dark blossom of a bloody seed!

ORESTES

Did she the deed or not? this robe gives proof,
Imbrued with blood that bathed Aegisthus' sword:
Look, how the spurted stain combines with time
To blur the many dyes that once adorned
Its pattern manifold! I now stand here,
Made glad, made sad with blood, exulting, wailing—
Hear, O thou woven web that slew my sire!
I grieve for deed and death and all my home—
Victor, pollution's damnèd stain for prize.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alas, that none of mortal men
Can pass his life untouched by pain!
Behold, one woe is here—
Another loometh near.

ORESTES

Hark ye and learn—for what the end shall be
For me I know not: breaking from the curb
My spirit whirls me off, a conquered prey,
Borne as a charioteer by steeds distraught
Far from the course, and madness in my breast
Burneth to chant its song, and leap, and rave—
Hark ye and learn, friends, ere my reason goes!
I say that rightfully I slew my mother,
A thing God-scorned, that foully slew my sire.
And chiefest wizard of the spell that bound me
Unto this deed I name the Pythian seer
Apollo, who foretold that if I slew,
The guilt of murder done should pass from me;
But if I spared, the fate that should be mine
I dare not blazon forth—the bow of speech
Can reach not to the mark, that doom to tell.
And now behold me, how with branch and crown
I pass, a suppliant made meet to go
Unto Earth's midmost shrine, the holy ground
Of Loxias, and that renownèd light
Of ever-burning fire, to 'scape the doom
Of kindred murder: to no other shrine
(So Loxias bade) may I for refuge turn.

Bear witness, Argives, in the after time,
How came on me this dread fatality.
Living, I pass a banished wanderer hence,
To leave in death the memory of this cry.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, but the deed is well; link not thy lips
To speech ill-starred, nor vent ill-boding words—
Who hast to Argos her full freedom given,
Lopping two serpents' heads with timely blow.

ORESTES

Look, look, alas!
Handmaidens, see—what Gorgon shapes throng up
Dusky their robes and all their hair enwound—
Snakes coiled with snakes—off, off,—I must away!

LEADER

Most loyal of all sons unto thy sire,
What visions thus distract thee? Hold, abide;
Great was thy victory, and shalt thou fear?

ORESTES

These are no dreams, void shapes of haunting ill,
But clear to sight my mother's hell-hounds come!

LEADER

Nay, the fresh bloodshed still imbrues thine hands,
And thence distraction sinks into thy soul.

ORESTES

O king Apollo—see, they swarm and throng—
Black blood of hatred dripping from their eyes!

LEADER

One remedy thou hast; go, touch the shrine
Of Loxias, and rid thee of these woes.

ORESTES

Ye can behold them not, but I behold them.
Up and away! I dare abide no more.
(*He rushes out.*)

LEADER

Farewell then as thou mayst,—the god thy friend
Guard thee and aid with chances favouring.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Behold, the storm of woe divine
That raves and beats on Atreus' line
  Its great third blast hath blown.
First was Thyestes' loathly woe—
The rueful feast of long ago,
  On children's flesh, unknown.
And next the kingly chief's despite,
When he who led the Greeks to fight
  Was in the bath hewn down.
And now the offspring of the race
Stands in the third, the saviour's place,
  To save—or to consume?
O whither, ere it be fulfilled,
Ere its fierce blast be hushed and stilled,
  Shall blow the wind of doom?

NOTE FOR THE CHOEPHORI

STUDENTS of *The Choephori* have always had to work against tremendous odds because of the exceptionally corrupt state of the Greek text. Morshead, in an appendix to his translation, has outlined in brief the general course which he has attempted to follow.

VII
THE EUMENIDES

Characters in the Play

The Pythian Priestess
Apollo
Orestes
The Ghost of Clytemnestra
Chorus of Furies
Athena
Attendants of Athena
Twelve Athenian Citizens

THE EUMENIDES

(SCENE:—*Before the temple of* APOLLO *at Delphi. The* PYTHIAN PRIESTESS *enters and approaches the doors of the temple.*)

THE PYTHIAN PRIESTESS

FIRST, in this prayer, of all the gods I name
The prophet-mother Earth; and Themis next,
Second who sat—for so with truth is said—
On this her mother's shrine oracular.
Then by her grace, who unconstrained allowed,
There sat thereon another child of Earth—
Titanian Phoebe. She, in after time,
Gave o'er the throne, as birthgift to a god,
Phoebus, who in his own bears Phoebe's name.
He from the lake and ridge of Delos' isle
Steered to the port of Pallas' Attic shores,
The home of ships; and thence he passed and came
Unto this land and to Parnassus' shrine.
And at his side, with awe revering him,
There went the children of Hephaestus' seed,
The hewers of the sacred way, who tame
The stubborn tract that erst was wilderness.
And all this folk, and Delphos, chieftain-king
Of this their land, with honour gave him home;
And in his breast Zeus set a prophet's soul,
And gave to him this throne, whereon he sits,
Fourth prophet of the shrine, and, Loxias hight,
Gives voice to that which Zeus his sire decrees.

Such gods I name in my preluding prayer,
And after them, I call with honour due
On Pallas, wardress of the fane, and Nymphs
Who dwell around the rock Corycian,
Where in the hollow cave, the wild birds' haunt,

Wander the feet of lesser gods; and there,
Right well I know it, Bromian Bacchus dwells,
Since he in godship led his Maenad host,
Devising death for Pentheus, whom they rent
Piecemeal, as hare among the hounds. And last,
I call on Pleistus' springs, Poseidon's might,
And Zeus most high, the great Accomplisher.
Then as a seeress to the sacred chair
I pass and sit; and may the powers divine
Make this mine entrance fruitful in response
Beyond each former advent, triply blest.
And if there stand without, from Hellas bound,
Men seeking oracles, let each pass in
In order of the lot, as use allows;
For the god guides whate'er my tongue proclaims.

(*She goes into the interior of the temple; after a short interval, she returns in great fear.*)

Things fell to speak of, fell for eyes to see,
Have sped me forth again from Loxias' shrine,
With strength unstrung, moving erect no more,
But aiding with my hands my failing feet,
Unnerved by fear. A beldame's force is naught—
Is as a child's, when age and fear combine.
For as I pace towards the inmost fane
Bay-filleted by many a suppliant's hand,
Lo, at the central altar I descry
One crouching as for refuge—yea, a man
Abhorred of heaven; and from his hands, wherein
A sword new-drawn he holds, blood reeked and fell:
A wand he bears, the olive's topmost bough,
Twined as of purpose with a deep close tuft
Of whitest wool. This, that I plainly saw,
Plainly I tell. But lo, in front of him,
Crouched on the altar-steps, a grisly band
Of women slumbers—not like women they,
But Gorgons rather; nay, that word is weak,
Nor may I match the Gorgons' shape with theirs!
Such have I seen in painted semblance erst—
Winged Harpies, snatching food from Phineus' board,—
But these are wingless, black, and all their shape
The eye's abomination to behold.
Fell is the breath—let none draw nigh to it—

Wherewith they snort in slumber; from their eyes
Exude the damnèd drops of poisonous ire:
And such their garb as none should dare to bring
To statues of the gods or homes of men.
I wot not of the tribe wherefrom can come
So fell a legion, nor in what land Earth
Could rear, unharmed, such creatures, nor avow
That she had travailed and had brought forth death.
But, for the rest, be all these things a care
Unto the mighty Loxias, the lord
Of this our shrine: healer and prophet he,
Discerner he of portents, and the cleanser
Of other homes—behold, his own to cleanse!

(*She goes out. The central doors open, disclosing the interior of the temple.* ORESTES *clings to the central altar; the* FURIES *lie slumbering at a little distance;* APOLLO *and* HERMES *appear from the innermost shrine.*)

APOLLO (*to* ORESTES)

Lo, I desert thee never: to the end,
Hard at thy side as now, or sundered far,
I am thy guard, and to thine enemies
Implacably oppose me: look on them,
These greedy fiends, beneath my craft subdued!
See, they are fallen on sleep, these beldames old,
Unto whose grim and wizened maidenhood
Nor god nor man nor beast can e'er draw near.
Yea, evil were they born, for evil's doom,
Evil the dark abyss of Tartarus
Wherein they dwell, and they themselves the hate
Of men on earth, and of Olympian gods.
But thou, flee far and with unfaltering speed;
For they shall hunt thee through the mainland wide
Where'er throughout the tract of travelled earth
Thy foot may roam, and o'er and o'er the seas
And island homes of men. Faint not nor fail,
Too soon and timidly within thy breast
Shepherding thoughts forlorn of this thy toil;
But unto Pallas' city go, and there
Crouch at her shrine, and in thine arms enfold
Her ancient image: there we well shall find
Meet judges for this cause and suasive pleas,
Skilled to contrive for thee deliverance

From all this woe. Be such my pledge to thee,
For by my hest thou didst thy mother slay.

ORESTES

O king Apollo, since right well thou know'st
What justice bids, have heed, fulfil the same,—
Thy strength is all-sufficient to achieve.

APOLLO

Have thou too heed, nor let thy fear prevail
Above thy will. And do thou guard him, Hermes,
Whose blood is brother unto mine, whose sire
The same high God. Men call thee guide and guard,
Guide therefore thou and guard my suppliant;
For Zeus himself reveres the outlaw's right,
Boon of fair escort, upon man conferred.

(APOLLO, HERMES, *and* ORESTES *go out. The* GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA *rises.*)

GHOST OF CLYTEMNESTRA

Sleep on! awake! what skills your sleep to me—
Me, among all the dead by you dishonoured—
Me from whom never, in the world of death,
Dieth this course, *'Tis she who smote and slew,*
And shamed and scorned I roam? Awake, and hear
My plaint of dead men's hate intolerable.
Me, sternly slain by them that should have loved,
Me doth no god arouse him to avenge,
Hewn down in blood by matricidal hands.
Mark ye these wounds from which the heart's blood ran,
And by whose hand, bethink ye! for the sense
When shut in sleep hath then the spirit-sight,
But in the day the inward eye is blind.
List, ye who drank so oft with lapping tongue
The wineless draught by me outpoured to soothe
Your vengeful ire! how oft on kindled shrine
I laid the feast of darkness, at the hour
Abhorred of every god but you alone!
Lo, all my service trampled down and scorned!
And he hath baulked your chase, as stag the hounds;
Yea, lightly bounding from the circling toils,
Hath wried his face in scorn, and flieth far.
Awake and hear—for mine own soul I cry—

Awake, ye powers of hell! the wandering ghost
That once was Clytemnestra calls—Arise!

(*The* FURIES *mutter grimly, as in a dream.*)

Mutter and murmur! He hath flown afar—
My kin have gods to guard them, I have none!

(*The* FURIES *mutter as before.*)

O drowsed in sleep too deep to heed my pain!
Orestes flies, who me, his mother, slew.

(*The* FURIES *give a confused cry.*)

Yelping, and drowsed again? Up and be doing
That which alone is yours, the deed of hell!

(*The* FURIES *give another cry.*)

Lo, sleep and toil, the sworn confederates,
Have quelled your dragon-anger, once so fell!

THE FURIES (*muttering more fiercely and loudly*)
Seize, seize, seize, seize—mark, yonder!

GHOST
In dreams ye chase a prey, and like some hound,
That even in sleep doth ply his woodland toil,
Ye bell and bay. What do ye, sleeping here?
Be not o'ercome with toil, nor, sleep-subdued,
Be heedless of my wrong. Up! thrill your heart
With the just chidings of my tongue,—such words
Are as a spur to purpose firmly held.
Blow forth on him the breath of wrath and blood,
Scorch him with reek of fire that burns in you,
Waste him with new pursuit—swift, hound him down!
(*The* GHOST *sinks.*)

FIRST FURY (*awaking*)
Up! rouse another as I rouse thee; up!
Sleep'st thou? Rise up, and spurning sleep away,
See we if false to us this prelude rang.

CHORUS OF FURIES (*singing*)
strophe 1
Alack, alack, O sisters, we have toiled,
O much and vainly have we toiled and borne!

Vainly! and all we wrought the gods have foiled,
And turnèd us to scorn!
He hath slipped from the net, whom we chased: he hath 'scaped us who should be our prey—
O'ermastered by slumber we sang, and our quarry hath stolen away!

antistrophe 1

Thou, child of the high God Zeus, Apollo, hast robbed us and wronged;
Thou, a youth, hast down-trodden the right that to godship more ancient belonged;
Thou hast cherished thy suppliant man; the slayer, the God-forsaken,
The bane of a parent, by craft from out of our grasp thou hast taken;
A god, thou hast stolen from us the avengers a matricide son—
And who shall consider thy deed and say, *It is rightfully done?*

strophe 2

The sound of chiding scorn
Came from the land of dream;
Deep to mine inmost heart I felt it thrill and burn,
Thrust as a strong-grasped goad, to urge
Onward the chariot's team.
Thrilled, chilled with bitter inward pain
I stand as one beneath the doomsman's scourge.

antistrophe 2

Shame on the younger gods who tread down right,
Sitting on thrones of might!
Woe on the altar of earth's central fane!
Clotted on step and shrine,
Behold, the guilt of blood, the ghastly stain!

strophe 3

Woe upon thee, Apollo! uncontrolled,
Unbidden, hast thou, prophet-god, imbrued
The pure prophetic shrine with wrongful blood!
For thou too heinous a respect didst hold
Of man, too little heed of powers divine!
And us the Fates, the ancients of the earth,
Didst deem as nothing worth.

antistrophe 3

Scornful to me thou art, yet shalt not fend
My wrath from him; though unto hell he flee,
There too are we!
And he the blood-defiled, should feel and rue,

Though I were not, fiend-wrath that shall not end,
Descending on his head who foully slew.

(APOLLO *enters from the inner shrine.*)

APOLLO

Out! I command you. Out from this my home—
Haste, tarry not! Out from the mystic shrine,
Lest thy lot be to take into thy breast
The winged bright dart that from my golden string
Speeds hissing as a snake,—lest, pierced and thrilled
With agony, thou shouldst spew forth again
Black frothy heart's-blood, drawn from mortal men,
Belching the gory clots sucked forth from wounds.
These be no halls where such as you can prowl—
Go where men lay on men the doom of blood,
Heads lopped from necks, eyes from their spheres plucked out,
Hacked flesh, the flower of youthful seed crushed out,
Feet hewn away, and hands, and death beneath
The smiting stone, low moans and piteous
Of men impaled—Hark, hear ye for what feast
Ye hanker ever, and the loathing gods
Do spit upon your craving? Lo, your shape
Is all too fitted to your greed; the cave
Where lurks some lion, lapping gore, were home
More meet for you. Avaunt from sacred shrines,
Nor bring pollution by your touch on all
That nears you. Hence! and roam unshepherded—
No god there is to tend such herd as you.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O king Apollo, in our turn hear us.
Thou hast not only part in these ill things,
But art chief cause and doer of the same.

APOLLO

How? stretch thy speech to tell this, and have done.

LEADER

Thine oracle bade this man slay his mother.

APOLLO

I bade him quit his sire's death,—wherefore not?

LEADER

Then didst thou aid and guard red-handed crime.

APOLLO
Yea, and I bade him to this temple flee.

LEADER
And yet forsooth dost chide us following him!

APOLLO
Ay—not for you it is, to near this fane.

LEADER
Yet is such office ours, imposed by fate.

APOLLO
What office? vaunt the thing ye deem so fair.

LEADER
From home to home we chase the matricide.

APOLLO
What? to avenge a wife who slays her lord?

LEADER
That is not blood outpoured by kindred hands.

APOLLO
How darkly ye dishonour and annul
The troth to which the high accomplishers,
Hera and Zeus, do honour. Yea, and thus
Is Aphrodite to dishonour cast,
The queen of rapture unto mortal men.
Know, that above the marriage-bed ordained
For man and woman standeth Right as guard,
Enhancing sanctity of trothplight sworn;
Therefore, if thou art placable to those
Who have their consort slain, nor will'st to turn
On them the eye of wrath, unjust art thou
In hounding to his doom the man who slew
His mother. Lo, I know thee full of wrath
Against one deed, but all too placable
Unto the other, minishing the crime.
But in this cause shall Pallas guard the right.

LEADER
Deem not my quest shall ever quit that man.

APOLLO
Follow then, make thee double toil in vain!

LEADER
Think not by speech mine office to curtail.

APOLLO
None hast thou, that I would accept of thee!

LEADER
Yea, high thine honour by the throne of Zeus:
But I, drawn on by scent of mother's blood,
Seek vengeance on this man and hound him down.

(*The* CHORUS *goes in pursuit of* ORESTES.)

APOLLO
But I will stand beside him; 'tis for me
To guard my suppliant: gods and men alike
Do dread the curse of such an one betrayed,
And in me Fear and Will say *Leave him not.*
(*He goes into the temple.*)

(*The scene changes to Athens. In the foreground is the Temple of* ATHENA *on the Acropolis; her statue stands in the centre;* ORESTES *is seen clinging to it.*)

ORESTES
Look on me, queen Athena; lo, I come
By Loxias' behest; thou of thy grace
Receive me, driven of avenging powers—
Not now a red-hand slayer unannealed,
But with guilt fading, half-effaced, outworn
On many homes and paths of mortal men.
For to the limit of each land, each sea,
I roamed, obedient to Apollo's hest,
And come at last, O Goddess, to thy fane,
And clinging to thine image, bide my doom.

(*The* CHORUS OF FURIES *enters, questing like hounds.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Ho! clear is here the trace of him we seek:
Follow the track of blood, the silent sign!
Like to some hound that hunts a wounded fawn,
We snuff along the scent of dripping gore,

And inwardly we pant, for many a day
Toiling in chase that shall fordo the man;
For o'er and o'er the wide land have I ranged,
And o'er the wide sea, flying without wings,
Swift as a sail I pressed upon his track,
Who now hard by is crouching, well I wot,
For scent of mortal blood allures me here.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Follow, seek him—round and round
Scent and snuff and scan the ground,
Lest unharmed he slip away,
He who did his mother slay!
Hist—he is there! See him his arms entwine
Around the image of the maid divine—
Thus aided, for the deed he wrought
Unto the judgment wills he to be brought.

It may not be! a mother's blood, poured forth
Upon the stainèd earth,
None gathers up: it lies—bear witness, Hell!—
For aye indelible!
And thou who sheddest it shalt give thine own
That shedding to atone!
Yea, from thy living limbs I suck it out,
Red, clotted, gout by gout,—
A draught abhorred of men and gods; but I
Will drain it, suck thee dry;
Yea, I will waste thee living, nerve and vein;
Yea, for thy mother slain,
Will drag thee downward, there where thou shalt dree
The weird of agony!
And thou and whosoe'er of men hath sinned—
Hath wronged or God, or friend,
Or parent,—learn ye how to all and each
The arm of doom can reach!
Sternly requiteth, in the world beneath,
The judgment-seat of Death;
Yea, Death, beholding every man's endeavour,
Recordeth it for ever.

ORESTES

I, schooled in many miseries, have learnt
How many refuges of cleansing shrines

There be; I know when law alloweth speech
And when imposeth silence. Lo, I stand
Fixed now to speak, for he whose word is wise
Commands the same. Look, how the stain of blood
Is dull upon mine hand and wastes away,
And laved and lost therewith is the deep curse
Of matricide; for while the guilt was new,
'Twas banished from me at Apollo's hearth,
Atoned and purified by death of swine.
Long were my word if I should sum the tale,
How oft since then among my fellow-men
I stood and brought no curse. Time cleanses all—
Time, the coeval of all things that are.
Now from pure lips, in words of omen fair,
I call Athena, lady of this land,
To come, my champion: so, in aftertime,
She shall not fail of love and service leal,
Not won by war, from me and from my land
And all the folk of Argos, vowed to her.
Now, be she far away in Libyan land
Where flows from Triton's lake her natal wave,—
Stand she with planted feet, or in some hour
Of rest conceal them, champion of her friends
Where'er she be,—or whether o'er the plain
Phlegraean she look forth, as warrior bold—
I cry to her to come, where'er she be,
(And she, as goddess, from afar can hear)
And aid and free me, set among my foes.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thee not Apollo nor Athena's strength
Can save from perishing, a castaway
Amid the Lost, where no delight shall meet
Thy soul—a bloodless prey of nether powers,
A shadow among shadows. Answerest thou
Nothing? dost cast away my words with scorn,
Thou, prey prepared and dedicate to me?
Not as a victim slain upon the shrine,
But living shalt thou see thy flesh my food.
Hear now the binding chant that makes thee mine.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Weave the weird dance,—behold the hour
To utter forth the chant of hell,

Our sway among mankind to tell,
The guidance of our power.
Of Justice are we ministers,
And whosoe'er of men may stand
Lifting a pure unsullied hand,
That man no doom of ours incurs,
And walks thro' all his mortal path
Untouched by woe, unharmed by wrath.
But if, as yonder man, he hath
Blood on the hands he strives to hide,
We stand avengers at his side,
Decreeing, *Thou hast wronged the dead:*
We are doom's witnesses to thee.
The price of blood, his hands have shed,
We wring from him; in life, in death,
Hard at his side are we!

strophe 1

Night, Mother Night, who brought me forth, a torment
To living men and dead,
Hear me, O hear! by Leto's stripling son
I am dishonourèd:
He hath ta'en from me him who cowers in refuge,
To me made consecrate,—
A rightful victim, him who slew his mother.
Given o'er to me and fate.

refrain 1

Hear the hymn of hell,
O'er the victim sounding,—
Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,
Sense and will confounding!
Round the soul entwining
Without lute or lyre—
Soul in madness pining,
Wasting as with fire!

antistrophe 1

Fate, all-pervading Fate, this service spun, commanding
That I should bide therein:
Whosoe'er of mortals, made perverse and lawless,
Is stained with blood of kin,
By his side are we, and hunt him ever onward,
Till to the Silent Land,

The realm of death, he cometh; neither yonder
In freedom shall he stand.

refrain 1

Hear the hymn of hell,
O'er the victim sounding,—
Chant of frenzy, chant of ill,
Sense and will confounding!
Round the soul entwining
Without lute or lyre—
Soul in madness pining,
Wasting as with fire!

strophe 2

When from womb of Night we sprang, on us this labour
Was laid and shall abide.
Gods immortal are ye, yet beware ye touch not
That which is our pride!
None may come beside us gathered round the blood-feast—
For us no garments white
Gleam on a festal day; for us a darker fate is,
Another darker rite.

refrain 2

That is mine hour when falls an ancient line—
When in the household's heart
The God of blood doth slay by kindred hands,—
Then do we bear our part:
On him who slays we sweep with chasing cry:
Though he be triply strong,
We wear and waste him; blood atones for blood,
New pain for ancient wrong.

antistrophe 2

I hold this task—'tis mine, and not another's.
The very gods on high,
Though they can silence and annul the prayers
Of those who on us cry,
They may not strive with us who stand apart,
A race by Zeus abhorred,
Blood-boltered, held unworthy of the council
And converse of Heaven's lord.

strophe 3

Therefore the more I leap upon my prey;
Upon their head I bound;

My foot is hard; as one that trips a runner
I cast them to the ground;
Yea, to the depth of doom intolerable;
And they who erst were great,
And upon earth held high their pride and glory,
Are brought to low estate.
In underworld they waste and are diminished,
The while around them fleet
Dark wavings of my robes, and, subtly woven,
The paces of my feet.

antistrophe 3

Who falls infatuate, he sees not neither knows he
That we are at his side;
So closely round about him, darkly flitting,
The cloud of guilt doth glide.
Heavily 'tis uttered, how around his hearthstone
The mirk of hell doth rise.

strophe 4

Stern and fixed the law is; we have hands t' achieve it,
Cunning to devise.
Queens are we and mindful of our solemn vengeance.
Not by tear or prayer
Shall a man avert it. In unhonoured darkness,
Far from gods, we fare,
Lit unto our task with torch of sunless regions,
And o'er a deadly way—
Deadly to the living as to those who see not
Life and light of day—
Hunt we and press onward.

antistrophe 4

Who of mortals hearing
Doth not quake for awe,
Hearing all that Fate thro' hand of God hath given us
For ordinance and law?
Yea, this right to us, in dark abysm and backward
Of ages it befel:
None shall wrong mine office, tho' in nether regions
And sunless dark I dwell.

(ATHENA *enters.*)

ATHENA

Far off I heard the clamour of your cry,
As by Scamander's side I set my foot
Asserting right upon the land given o'er
To me by those who o'er Achaea's host
Held sway and leadership: no scanty part
Of all they won by spear and sword, to me
They gave it, land and all that grew thereon,
As chosen heirloom for my Theseus' clan.
Thence summoned, sped I with a tireless foot,—
Hummed on the wind, instead of wings, the fold
Of this mine aegis, by my feet propelled,
As, linked to mettled horses, speeds a car.
And now, beholding here Earth's nether brood,
I fear it nought, yet are mine eyes amazed
With wonder. Who are ye? of all I ask,
And of this stranger to my statue clinging.
But ye—your shape is like no human form,
Like to no goddess whom the gods behold,
Like to no shape which mortal women wear.
Yet to stand by and chide a monstrous form
Is all unjust—from such words Right revolts.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O child of Zeus, one word shall tell thee all.
We are the children of eternal Night,
And Furies in the underworld are called.

ATHENA

I know your lineage now and eke your name.

LEADER

Yea, and eftsoons indeed my rights shalt know.

ATHENA

Fain would I learn them; speak them clearly forth.

LEADER

We chase from home the murderers of men.

ATHENA

And where at last can he that slew make pause?

LEADER

Where this is law—*All joy abandon here.*

ATHENA
Say, do ye bay this man to such a flight?

LEADER
Yea, for of choice he did his mother slay.

ATHENA
Urged by no fear of other wrath and doom?

LEADER
What spur can rightly goad to matricide?

ATHENA
Two stand to plead—one only have I heard.

LEADER
He will not swear nor challenge us to oath.

ATHENA
The form of justice, not its deed, thou willest.

LEADER
Prove thou that word; thou art not scant of skill.

ATHENA
I say that oaths shall not enforce the wrong.

LEADER
Then test the cause, judge and award the right.

ATHENA
Will ye to me then this decision trust?

LEADER
Yea, reverencing true child of worthy sire.

ATHENA (*to* ORESTES)
O man unknown, make thou thy plea in turn.
Speak forth thy land, thy lineage, and thy woes;
Then, if thou canst, avert this bitter blame—
If, as I deem, in confidence of right
Thou sittest hard beside my holy place,
Clasping this statue, as Ixion sat,
A sacred suppliant for Zeus to cleanse,—
To all this answer me in words made plain.

ORESTES

O queen Athena, first from thy last words
Will I a great solicitude remove.
Not one blood-guilty am I; no foul stain
Clings to thine image from my clinging hand;
Whereof one potent proof I have to tell.
Lo, the law stands—*The slayer shall not plead,*
Till by the hand of him who cleanses blood
A suckling creature's blood besprinkle him.
Long since have I this expiation done,—
In many a home, slain beasts and running streams
Have cleansed me. Thus I speak away that fear.
Next, of my lineage quickly thou shalt learn:
An Argive am I, and right well thou know'st
My sire, that Agamemnon who arrayed
The fleet and them that went therein to war—
That chief with whom thy hand combined to crush
To an uncitied heap what once was Troy;
That Agamemnon, when he homeward came,
Was brought unto no honourable death,
Slain by the dark-souled wife who brought me forth
To him,—enwound and slain in wily nets,
Blazoned with blood that in the laver ran.
And I, returning from an exiled youth,
Slew her, my mother—lo, it stands avowed!
With blood for blood avenging my loved sire;
And in this deed doth Loxias bear part,
Decreeing agonies, to goad my will,
Unless by me the guilty found their doom.
Do thou decide if right or wrong were done—
Thy dooming, whatsoe'er it be, contents me.

ATHENA

Too mighty is this matter, whosoe'er
Of mortals claims to judge hereof aright.
Yea, me, even me, eternal Right forbids
To judge the issues of blood-guilt, and wrath
That follows swift behind. This too gives pause,
That thou as one with all due rites performed
Dost come, unsinning, pure, unto my shrine.
Whate'er thou art, in this my city's name,
As uncondemned, I take thee to my side.—
Yet have these foes of thine such dues by fate,

I may not banish them: and if they fail,
O'erthrown in judgment of the cause, forthwith
Their anger's poison shall infect the land—
A dropping plague-spot of eternal ill.
Thus stand we with a woe on either hand:
Stay they, or go at my commandment forth,
Perplexity or pain must needs befall.
Yet, as on me Fate hath imposed the cause,
I choose unto me judges that shall be
An ordinance for ever, set to rule
The dues of blood-guilt, upon oath declared.
But ye, call forth your witness and your proof,
Words strong for justice, fortified by oath;
And I, whoe'er are truest in my town,
Them will I choose and bring, and straitly charge,
Look on this cause, discriminating well,
And pledge your oath to utter nought of wrong.

(ATHENA *withdraws.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Now are they all undone, the ancient laws,
If here the slayer's cause
Prevail; new wrong for ancient right shall be
If matricide go free.
Henceforth a deed like his by all shall stand,
Too ready to the hand:
Too oft shall parents in the aftertime
Rue and lament this crime,—
Taught, not in false imagining, to feel
Their children's thrusting steel:
No more the wrath, that erst on murder fell
From us, the queens of Hell,
Shall fall, no more our watching gaze impend—
Death shall smite unrestrained.

antistrophe 1

Henceforth shall one unto another cry
Lo, they are stricken, lo, they fall and die
Around me! and that other answers him,
O thou that lookest that thy woes should cease,
Behold, with dark increase
They throng and press upon thee; yea, and dim
Is all the cure, and every comfort vain!

strophe 2

Let none henceforth cry out, when falls the blow
Of sudden-smiting woe,
Cry out in sad reiterated strain
O Justice, aid! aid, O ye thrones of Hell!
So though a father or a mother wail
New-smitten by a son, it shall no more avail,
Since, overthrown by wrong, the fane of Justice fell!

antistrophe 2

Know, that a throne there is that may not pass away,
And one that sitteth on it—even Fear,
Searching with steadfast eyes man's inner soul:
Wisdom is child of pain, and born with many a tear;
But who henceforth,
What man of mortal men, what nation upon earth,
That holdeth nought in awe nor in the light
Of inner reverence, shall worship Right
As in the older day?

strophe 3

Praise not, O man, the life beyond control,
Nor that which bows unto a tyrant's sway.
Know that the middle way
Is dearest unto God, and they thereon who wend,
They shall achieve the end;
But they who wander or to left or right
Are sinners in his sight.
Take to thy heart this one, this soothfast word—
Of wantonness impiety is sire;
Only from calm control and sanity unstirred
Cometh true weal, the goal of every man's desire.

antistrophe 3

Yea, whatsoe'er befall, hold thou this word of mine:
Bow down at Justice' shrine,
Turn thou thine eyes away from earthly lure,
Nor with a godless foot that altar spurn.
For as thou dost shall Fate do in return,
And the great doom is sure.
Therefore let each adore a parent's trust,
And each with loyalty revere the guest
That in his halls doth rest.

strophe 4

For whoso uncompelled doth follow what is just,
He ne'er shall be unblest;
Yea, never to the gulf of doom
That man shall come.

But he whose will is set against the gods,
Who treads beyond the law with foot impure,
Till o'er the wreck of Right confusion broods,—
Know that for him, though now he sail secure,
The day of storm shall be; then shall he strive and fail
Down from the shivered yard to furl the sail,

antistrophe 4

And call on Powers, that heed him nought, to save,
And vainly wrestle with the whirling wave.
Hot was his heart with pride—
I shall not fall, he cried.
But him with watching scorn
The god beholds, forlorn,
Tangled in toils of Fate beyond escape,
Hopeless of haven safe beyond the cape—
Till all his wealth and bliss of bygone day
Upon the reef of Rightful Doom is hurled,
And he is rapt away
Unwept, for ever, to the dead forgotten world.

(ATHENA *enters, with* TWELVE ATHENIAN CITIZENS. *A large crowd follows.*)

ATHENA

O herald, make proclaim, bid all men come.
Then let the shrill blast of the Tyrrhene trump,
Fulfilled with mortal breath, thro' the wide air
Peal a loud summons, bidding all men heed.
For, till my judges fill this judgment-seat,
Silence behoves,—that this whole city learn,
What for all time mine ordinance commands,
And these men, that the cause be judged aright.

(APOLLO *enters.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O king Apollo, rule what is thine own,
But in this thing what share pertains to thee?

APOLLO

First, as a witness come I, for this man
Is suppliant of mine by sacred right,
Guest of my holy hearth and cleansed by me
Of blood-guilt: then, to set me at his side
And in his cause bear part, as part I bore
Erst in his deed, whereby his mother fell.
Let whoso knoweth now announce the cause.

ATHENA (*to the* CHORUS)

'Tis I announce the cause—first speech be yours;
For rightfully shall they whose plaint is tried
Tell the tale first and set the matter clear.

LEADER

Though we be many, brief shall be our tale.
(*To* ORESTES)
Answer thou, setting word to match with word;
And first avow—hast thou thy mother slain?

ORESTES

I slew her. I deny no word hereof.

LEADER

Three falls decide the wrestle—this is one.

ORESTES

Thou vauntest thee—but o'er no final fall.

LEADER

Yet must thou tell the manner of thy deed.

ORESTES

Drawn sword in hand, I gashed her neck. 'Tis told.

LEADER

But by whose word, whose craft, wert thou impelled?

ORESTES

By oracles of him who here attests me.

LEADER

The prophet-god bade thee thy mother slay?

ORESTES

Yea, and thro' him less ill I fared, till now.

LEADER

If the vote grip thee, thou shalt change that word.

ORESTES

Strong is my hope; my buried sire shall aid.

LEADER

Go to now, trust the dead, a matricide!

ORESTES

Yea, for in her combined two stains of sin.

LEADER

How? speak this clearly to the judges' mind.

ORESTES

Slaying her husband, she did slay my sire.

LEADER

Therefore thou livest; death assoils her deed.

ORESTES

Then while she lived why didst thou hunt her not?

LEADER

She was not kin by blood to him she slew.

ORESTES

And I, am I by blood my mother's kin?

LEADER

O cursed with murder's guilt, how else wert thou
The burden of her womb? Dost thou forswear
Thy mother's kinship, closest bond of love?

ORESTES

It is thine hour, Apollo—speak the law,
Averring if this deed were justly done;
For done it is, and clear and undenied.
But if to thee this murder's cause seem right
Or wrongful, speak—that I to these may tell.

APOLLO

To you, Athena's mighty council-court,
Justly for justice will I plead, even I,
The prophet-god, nor cheat you by one word.
For never spake I from my prophet-seat

One word, of man, of woman, or of state,
Save what the Father of Olympian gods
Commanded unto me. I rede you then,
Bethink you of my plea, how strong it stands,
And follow the decree of Zeus our sire,—
For oaths prevail not over Zeus' command.

LEADER

Go to; thou sayest that from Zeus befell
The oracle that this Orestes bade
With vengeance quit the slaying of his sire,
And hold as nought his mother's right of kin!

APOLLO

Yea, for it stands not with a common death,
That he should die, a chieftain and a king
Decked with the sceptre which high heaven confers—
Die, and by female hands, not smitten down
By a far-shooting bow, held stalwartly
By some strong Amazon. Another doom
Was his: O Pallas, hear, and ye who sit
In judgment, to discern this thing aright!—
She with a specious voice of welcome true
Hailed him, returning from the mighty mart
Where war for life gives fame, triumphant home;
Then o'er the laver, as he bathed himself,
She spread from head to foot a covering net,
And in the endless mesh of cunning robes
Enwound and trapped her lord, and smote him down.
Lo, ye have heard what doom this chieftain met,
The majesty of Greece, the fleet's high lord:
Such as I tell it, let it gall your ears,
Who stand as judges to decide this cause.

LEADER

Zeus, as thou sayest, holds a father's death
As first of crimes,—yet he of his own act
Cast into chains his father, Cronus old:
How suits that deed with that which now ye tell?
O ye who judge, I bid ye mark my words!

APOLLO

O monsters loathed of all, O scorn of gods,
He that hath bound may loose: a cure there is,

Yea, many a plan that can unbind the chain.
But when the thirsty dust sucks up man's blood
Once shed in death, he shall arise no more.
No chant nor charm for this my Sire hath wrought.
All else there is, he moulds and shifts at will,
Not scant of strength nor breath, whate'er he do.

LEADER

Think yet, for what acquittal thou dost plead:
He who hath shed a mother's kindred blood,
Shall he in Argos dwell, where dwelt his sire?
How shall he stand before the city's shrines,
How share the clansmen's holy lustral bowl?

APOLLO

This too I answer; mark a soothfast word
Not the true parent is the woman's womb
That bears the child; she doth but nurse the seed
New-sown: the male is parent; she for him,
As stranger for a stranger, hoards the germ
Of life, unless the god its promise blight.
And proof hereof before you will I set.
Birth may from fathers, without mothers, be:
See at your side a witness of the same,
Athena, daughter of Olympian Zeus,
Never within the darkness of the womb
Fostered nor fashioned, but a bud more bright
Than any goddess in her breast might bear.
And I, O Pallas, howsoe'er I may,
Henceforth will glorify thy town, thy clan,
And for this end have sent my suppliant here
Unto thy shrine; that he from this time forth
Be loyal unto thee for evermore,
O goddess-queen, and thou unto thy side
Mayst win and hold him faithful, and his line,
And that for aye this pledge and troth remain
To children's children of Athenian seed.

ATHENA

Enough is said; I bid the judges now
With pure intent deliver just award.

LEADER

We too have shot our every shaft of speech,
And now abide to hear the doom of law.

ATHENA (*to* APOLLO *and* ORESTES)

Say, how ordaining shall I 'scape your blame?

APOLLO

I spake, ye heard; enough. O stranger men,
Heed well your oath as ye decide the cause.

ATHENA

O men of Athens, ye who first do judge
The law of bloodshed, hear me now ordain.
Here to all time for Aegeus' Attic host
Shall stand this council-court of judges sworn,
Here the tribunal, set on Ares' Hill
Where camped of old the tented Amazons,
What time in hate of Theseus they assailed
Athens, and set against her citadel
A counterwork of new sky-pointing towers,
And there to Ares held their sacrifice,
Where now the rock hath name, even Ares' Hill.
And hence shall Reverence and her kinsman Fear
Pass to each free man's heart, by day and night
Enjoining, *Thou shalt do no unjust thing,*
So long as law stands as it stood of old
Unmarred by civic change. Look you, the spring
Is pure; but foul it once with influx vile
And muddy clay, and none can drink thereof.
Therefore, O citizens, I bid ye bow
In awe to this command, *Let no man live*
Uncurbed by law nor curbed by tyranny;
Nor banish ye the monarchy of Awe
Beyond the walls; untouched by fear divine,
No man doth justice in the world of men.
Therefore in purity and holy dread
Stand and revere; so shall ye have and hold
A saving bulwark of the state and land,
Such as no man hath ever elsewhere known,
Nor in far Scythia, nor in Pelops' realm.
Thus I ordain it now, a council-court
Pure and unsullied by the lust of gain,
Sacred and swift to vengeance, wakeful ever

To champion men who sleep, the country's guard.
Thus have I spoken, thus to mine own clan
Commended it for ever. Ye who judge,
Arise, take each his vote, mete out the right,
Your oath revering. Lo, my word is said.

(*The twelve judges come forward, one by one, to the urns of decision; the first votes; as each of the others follows, the* LEADER *and* APOLLO *speak alternately.*)

LEADER

I rede ye well, beware! nor put to shame,
In aught, this grievous company of hell.

APOLLO

I too would warn you, fear mine oracles—
From Zeus they are,—nor make them void of fruit.

LEADER

Presumptuous is thy claim, blood-guilt to judge,
And false henceforth thine oracles shall be.

APOLLO

Failed then the counsels of my sire, when turned
Ixion, first of slayers, to his side?

LEADER

These are but words; but I, if justice fail me,
Will haunt this land in grim and deadly deed.

APOLLO

Scorn of the younger and the elder gods
Art thou: 'tis I that shall prevail anon.

LEADER

Thus didst thou too of old in Pheres' halls,
O'erreaching Fate to make a mortal deathless.[1]

APOLLO

Was it not well, my worshipper to aid,
Then most of all when hardest was the need?

LEADER

I say thou didst annul the lots of life,
Cheating with wine the deities of eld.

APOLLO

I say thou shalt anon, thy pleadings foiled,
Spit venom vainly on thine enemies.

LEADER

Since this young god o'errides mine ancient right,
I tarry but to claim your law, not knowing
If wrath of mine shall blast your state or spare.

ATHENA

Mine is the right to add the final vote,
And I award it to Orestes' cause.
For me no mother bore within her womb,
And, save for wedlock evermore eschewed,
I vouch myself the champion of the man,
Not of the woman, yea, with all my soul,—
In heart, as birth, a father's child alone.
Thus will I not too heinously regard
A woman's death who did her husband slay,
The guardian of her home; and if the votes
Equal do fall, Orestes shall prevail.

Ye of the judges who are named thereto,
Swiftly shake forth the lots from either urn.

(*Two judges come forward, one to each urn.*)

ORESTES

O bright Apollo, what shall be the end?

LEADER

O Night, dark mother mine, dost mark these things?

ORESTES

Now shall my doom be life, or strangling cords.

LEADER

And mine, lost honour or a wider sway.

APOLLO

O stranger judges, sum aright the count
Of votes cast forth, and, parting them, take heed
Ye err not in decision. The default
Of one vote only bringeth ruin deep,
One, cast aright, doth stablish house and home.

ATHENA

Behold, this man is free from guilt of blood,
For half the votes condemn him, half set free!

ORESTES

O Pallas, light and safety of my home,
Thou, thou hast given me back to dwell once more
In that my fatherland, amerced of which
I wandered; now shall Grecian lips say this,
The man is Argive once again, and dwells
Again within his father's wealthy hall,
By Pallas saved, by Loxias, and by Him,
The great third saviour, Zeus omnipotent—
Who thus in pity for my father's fate
Doth pluck me from my doom, beholding these,
Confederates of my mother. Lo, I pass
To mine own home, but proffering this vow
Unto thy land and people: *Nevermore,*
Thro' all the manifold years of Time to be,
Shall any chieftain of mine Argive land
Bear hitherward his spears for fight arrayed.
For we, though lapped in earth we then shall lie,
By thwart adversities will work our will
On them who shall transgress this oath of mine,
Paths of despair and journeyings ill-starred
For them ordaining, till their task they rue.
But if this oath be rightly kept, to them
Will we the dead be full of grace, the while
With loyal league they honour Pallas' town.
And now farewell, thou and thy city's folk—
Firm be thine arms' grasp, closing with thy foes,
And, strong to save, bring victory to thy spear.

(ORESTES *and* APOLLO *depart.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe on you, younger gods! the ancient right
Ye have o'erridden, rent it from my hands.

I am dishonoured of you, thrust to scorn!
But heavily my wrath
Shall on this land fling forth the drops that blast and burn,
Venom of vengeance, that shall work such scathe
As I have suffered; where that dew shall fall,

Shall leafless blight arise,
Wasting Earth's offspring,—Justice, hear my call!—
And thorough all the land in deadly wise
Shall scatter venom, to exude again
In pestilence on men.
What cry avails me now, what deed of blood,
Unto this land what dark despite?
Alack, alack, forlorn
Are we, a bitter injury have borne!
Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood
Of mother Night!

ATHENA

Nay, bow ye to my words, chafe not nor moan:
Ye are not worsted nor disgraced; behold,
With balanced vote the cause had issue fair,
Nor in the end did aught dishonour thee.
But thus the will of Zeus shone clearly forth,
And his own prophet-god avouched the same,
Orestes slew: his slaying is atoned.
Therefore I pray you, not upon this land
Shoot forth the dart of vengeance; be appeased,
Nor blast the land with blight, nor loose thereon
Drops of eternal venom, direful darts
Wasting and marring nature's seed of growth.
For I, the queen of Athens' sacred right,
Do pledge to you a holy sanctuary
Deep in the heart of this my land, made just
By your indwelling presence, while ye sit
Hard by your sacred shrines that gleam with oil
Of sacrifice, and by this folk adored.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

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Alack, O sisters, O dishonoured brood
Of mother Night!

ATHENA

Dishonoured are ye not; turn not, I pray,
As goddesses your swelling wrath on men,
Nor make the friendly earth despiteful to them.
I too have Zeus for champion—'tis enough—
I only of all goddesses do know
To ope the chamber where his thunderbolts
Lie stored and sealed; but here is no such need.
Nay, be appeased, nor cast upon the ground
The malice of thy tongue, to blast the world;
Calm thou thy bitter wrath's black inward surge,
For high shall be thine honour, set beside me
For ever in this land, whose fertile lap
Shall pour its teeming firstfruits unto you,
Gifts for fair childbirth and for wedlock's crown:
Thus honoured, praise my spoken pledge for aye.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,—
Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,
Woe, woe for thee, for me!
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust,
And brought me to the dust—
Woe, woe is me!—with craft invincible.

ATHENA

Older art thou than I, and I will bear
With this thy fury. Know, although thou be
More wise in ancient wisdom, yet have I
From Zeus no scanted measure of the same,
Wherefore take heed unto this prophecy—
If to another land of alien men

Ye go, too late shall ye feel longing deep
For mine. The rolling tides of time bring round
A day of brighter glory for this town;
And thou, enshrined in honour by the halls
Where dwelt Erechtheus, shalt a worship win
From men and from the train of womankind,
Greater than any tribe elsewhere shall pay.
Cast thou not therefore on this soil of mine
Whetstones that sharpen souls to bloodshedding,
The burning goads of youthful hearts, made hot
With frenzy of the spirit, not of wine.
Nor pluck as 'twere the heart from cocks that strive,
To set it in the breast of citizens
Of mine, a war-god's spirit, keen for fight,
Made stern against their country and their kin.
The man who grievously doth lust for fame,
War, full, immitigable, let him wage
Against the stranger; but of kindred birds
I hold the challenge hateful. Such the boon
I proffer thee—within this land of lands,
Most loved of gods, with me to show and share
Fair mercy, gratitude and grace as fair.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I, I dishonoured in this earth to dwell,—
Ancient of days and wisdom! I breathe forth
Poison and breath of frenzied ire. O Earth,
Woe, woe for thee, for me!
From side to side what pains be these that thrill?
Hearken, O mother Night, my wrath, mine agony!
Whom from mine ancient rights the gods have thrust
And brought me to the dust—
Woe, woe is me!—with craft invincible.

ATHENA

I will not weary of soft words to thee,
That never mayst thou say, *Behold me spurned,*
An elder by a younger deity,
And from this land rejected and forlorn,
Unhonoured by the men who dwell therein.
But, if Persuasion's grace be sacred to thee,
Soft in the soothing accents of my tongue,
Tarry, I pray thee; yet, if go thou wilt,

Not rightfully wilt thou on this my town
Sway down the scale that beareth wrath and teen
Or wasting plague upon this folk. 'Tis thine,
If so thou wilt, inheritress to be
Of this my land, its utmost grace to win.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
O queen, what refuge dost thou promise me?

ATHENA
Refuge untouched by bale: take thou my boon.

LEADER
What, if I take it, shall mine honour be?

ATHENA
No house shall prosper without grace of thine.

LEADER
Canst thou achieve and grant such power to me?

ATHENA
Yea, for my hand shall bless thy worshippers.

LEADER
And wilt thou pledge me this for time eterne?

ATHENA
Yea: none can bid me pledge beyond my power.

LEADER
Lo, I desist from wrath, appeased by thee.

ATHENA
Then in the land's heart shalt thou win thee friends.

LEADER
What chant dost bid me raise, to greet the land?

ATHENA
Such as aspires towards a victory
Unrued by any: chants from breast of earth,
From wave, from sky; and let the wild winds' breath
Pass with soft sunlight o'er the lap of land,—
Strong wax the fruits of earth, fair teem the kine,
Unfailing, for my town's prosperity,
And constant be the growth of mortal seed.

But more and more root out the impious,
For as a gardener fosters what he sows,
So foster I this race, whom righteousness
Doth fend from sorrow. Such the proffered boon.
But I, if wars must be, and their loud clash
And carnage, for my town, will ne'er endure
That aught but victory shall crown her fame.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo, I accept it; at her very side
Doth Pallas bid me dwell:
I will not wrong the city of her pride,
Which even Almighty Zeus and Ares hold
Heaven's earthly citadel,
Loved home of Grecian gods, the young, the old,
The sanctuary divine,
The shield of every shrine!
For Athens I say forth a gracious prophecy,—
The glory of the sunlight and the skies
Shall bid from earth arise
Warm wavelets of new life and glad prosperity.

ATHENA (*chanting*)

Behold, with gracious heart well pleased
I for my citizens do grant
Fulfilment of this covenant:
And here, their wrath at length appeased,
These mighty deities shall stay.
For theirs it is by right to sway
The lot that rules our mortal day,
And he who hath not inly felt
Their stern decree, ere long on him,
Not knowing why and whence, the grim
Life-crushing blow is dealt.
The father's sin upon the child
Descends, and sin is silent death,
And leads him on the downward path,
By stealth beguiled,
Unto the Furies: though his state
On earth were high, and loud his boast,
Victim of silent ire and hate
He dwells among the Lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

To my blessing now give ear.—
Scorching blight nor singèd air
Never blast thine olives fair!
Drouth, that wasteth bud and plant,
Keep to thine own place. Avaunt,
Famine fell, and come not hither
Stealthily to waste and wither!
Let the land, in season due,
Twice her waxing fruits renew;
Teem the kine in double measure;
Rich in new god-given treasure;
Here let men the powers adore
For sudden gifts unhoped before!

ATHENA (*chanting*)

O hearken, warders of the wall
That guards mine Athens, what a dower
Is unto her ordained and given!
For mighty is the Furies' power,
And deep-revered in courts of heaven
And realms of hell; and clear to all
They weave thy doom, mortality!
And some in joy and peace shall sing;
But unto other some they bring
Sad life and tear-dimmed eye.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

And far away I ban thee and remove,
Untimely death of youths too soon brought low!
And to each maid, O gods, when time is come for love,
Grant ye a warrior's heart, a wedded life to know.
Ye too, O Fates, children of mother Night,
Whose children too are we, O goddesses
Of just award, of all by sacred right
Queens, who in time and in eternity
Do rule, a present power for righteousness,
Honoured beyond all Gods, hear ye and grant my cry!

ATHENA (*chanting*)

And I too, I with joy am fain,
Hearing your voice this gift ordain
Unto my land. High thanks be thine,
Persuasion, who with eyes divine

Into my tongue didst look thy strength,
To bend and to appease at length
Those who would not be comforted.
Zeus, king of parley, doth prevail,
And ye and I will strive nor fail,
That good may stand in evil's stead,
And lasting bliss for bale.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

And nevermore these walls within
Shall echo fierce sedition's din,
Unslaked with blood and crime;
The thirsty dust shall nevermore
Suck up the darkly streaming gore
Of civic broils, shed out in wrath
And vengeance, crying death for death!
But man with man and state with state
Shall vow *The pledge of common hate*
And common friendship, that for man
Hath oft made blessing out of ban,
Be ours unto all time.

ATHENA (*chanting*)

Skill they, or not, the path to find
Of favouring speech and presage kind?
Yea, even from these, who, grim and stern,
Glared anger upon you of old,
O citizens, ye now shall earn
A recompense right manifold.
Deck them aright, extol them high,
Be loyal to their loyalty,
And ye shall make your town and land
Sure, propped on Justice' saving hand,
And Fame's eternity.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Hail ye, all hail! and yet again, all hail,
O Athens, happy in a weal secured!
O ye who sit by Zeus' right hand, nor fail
Of wisdom set among you and assured,
Loved of the well-loved Goddess-Maid! the King
Of gods doth reverence you, beneath her guarding wing.

ATHENA (*chanting*)

All hail unto each honoured guest!
Whom to the chambers of your rest
'Tis mine to lead, and to provide
The hallowed torch, the guard and guide.
Pass down, the while these altars glow
With sacred fire, to earth below
And your appointed shrine.
There dwelling, from the land restrain
The force of fate, the breath of bane,
But waft on us the gift and gain
Of Victory divine!
And ye, the men of Cranaos' seed,
I bid you now with reverence lead
These alien Powers that thus are made
Athenian evermore. To you
Fair be their will henceforth, to do
Whate'er may bless and aid!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Hail to you all! hail yet again,
All who love Athens, gods and men,
Adoring her as Pallas' home!
And while ye reverence what ye grant—
My sacred shrine and hidden haunt—
Blameless and blissful be your doom!

ATHENA

Once more I praise the promise of your vows,
And now I bid the golden torches' glow
Pass down before you to the hidden depth
Of earth, by mine own sacred servants borne,
My loyal guards of statue and of shrine.
Come forth, O flower of Theseus' Attic land,
O glorious band of children and of wives,
And ye, O train of matrons crowned with eld!
Deck you with festal robes of scarlet dye
In honour of this day: O gleaming torch,
Lead onward, that these gracious powers of earth
Henceforth be seen to bless the life of men.

(ATHENA *leads the procession downwards into the Cave of the* FURIES, *now Eumenides, under the Areopagus: as they go, the escort of women and children chant aloud.*)

CHANT

With loyalty we lead you; proudly go,
Night's childless children, to your home below!
(*O citizens, awhile from words forbear!*)
To darkness' deep primeval lair,
Far in Earth's bosom, downward fare,
Adored with prayer and sacrifice.
(*O citizens, forbear your cries!*)
Pass hitherward, ye powers of Dread,
With all your former wrath allayed,
Into the heart of this loved land;
With joy unto your temple wend,
The while upon your steps attend
The flames that feed upon the brand—
(*Now, now ring out your chant, your joy's acclaim!*)
Behind them, as they downward fare,
Let holy hands libations bear,
And torches' sacred flame.
All-seeing Zeus and Fate come down
To battle fair for Pallas' town!
Ring out your chant, ring out your joy's acclaim!

NOTE FOR THE EUMENIDES

1. Apollo had agreed to spare the life of Admetus, the son of Pheres, provided that he could get someone to die in his stead. The legend is the subject of Euripides' *Alcestis*.

THE PLAYS OF SOPHOCLES

I

AJAX

Characters in the Play

Athena
Odysseus
Ajax
Chorus of Salaminians
Tecmessa, *concubine of* Ajax
Messenger
Teucer, *half-brother of* Ajax
Menelaus
Agamemnon

Mute Persons

Eurysaces, *child of* Ajax *and* Tecmessa
Attendants, Heralds, etc.

INTRODUCTION

SOPHOCLES' *Ajax,* probably the earliest of his extant plays, presents in dramatic form an episode derived from epic sources. The great Ajax, son of Telamon, figures in an important capacity in the *Iliad,* where he is consistently regarded as the most powerful Greek warrior after Achilles. The poet calls him the "bulwark of the Achaeans," and stresses frequently his physical and military prowess. This Homeric characterization has greatly influenced Sophocles in his portrayal of the hero. The particular events, however, which the dramatist treats in this play occurred in the interval between the periods covered by the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey,* and consequently Sophocles must have relied upon material found in other poems of the epic cycle. The saga recorded that, after the death of Achilles, there was a contest to determine which of the Greek heroes should inherit his arms. Ajax and Odysseus were the leading contenders and the award ultimately fell to the latter, according to the decision of the Greek leaders. Ajax, thinking that his honour had been stained, set out at night to murder Agamemnon and Menelaus, who he felt were responsible for his ill-treatment. Athena, angry at Ajax because he had previously exhibited excessive pride and now was planning to do a deed of violence, sent madness upon him. In his frenzy, he turned upon the flocks of the army, slaughtered some of the beasts and led others to his tent, thinking that he was actually killing and torturing the Greek leaders themselves. Sophocles' play opens on the morning after Ajax has committed his insane acts.

The *Ajax* contains several excellent characterizations. Odysseus is revealed as almost comically timorous in the opening scene, and yet he exhibits great magnanimity at the close of the play. Athena embodies a rather uncompromising interpretation of the gods' power and their jealous ordering of human affairs. Sophocles has endowed Teucer with the quality of superb and unbending loyalty, while he makes Menelaus and Agamemnon thoroughly unsympathetic. Tecmessa, Ajax's devoted concubine, remains one of the most appealing female characters in Greek tragedy. Yet all these persons are subordinated to the portrayal of Ajax, who dominates the action. He is studied with great care, precisely at the mo-

ment when he has recovered his reason, and gradually becomes aware of what he has done. Later in the play his very inner being is revealed in his long speech to the Chorus composed of his followers. He preserves a magnificent ambiguity, so that they are comforted, yet there can be no doubt that the peace he seeks is the peace of death. The poet puts the finishing touches upon his portrait in Ajax's final speech before his death, where he calls down curses upon his enemies, but implicit in his words, here and in the former speech, is the thought that death, evil though it be, is the only solution for him, the only way whereby he can assume the responsibility for what he has done.

Critics have argued that the remaining third of the play after Ajax's death, in which the question at issue is whether or not his body shall receive ritual burial, does not grow naturally out of what has preceded. In attempting to meet this criticism, we must not forget that great importance was attached to the funeral rites among the Greeks, who believed that only by proper burial would the soul after death be freed from an eternity of homeless wandering. That the Greeks were preoccupied with this question is attested by the frequency with which the theme appears in their dramas. For example, Sophocles has made it central in his *Antigone*. In the *Ajax,* though perhaps the play's total artistic integration may leave something to be desired, the last part basically coheres with the earlier sections of the play because only by proper burial can Ajax as a person be worthily rehabilitated according to the Greek view. The final scenes of the *Ajax* are therefore necessary, to save the play from ending on a note of complete despair, which is never characteristic of true tragedy.

AJAX

(SCENE:—*Before the tent of* AJAX *in the Greek camp at Troy. It is dawn.* ODYSSEUS *is discovered examining the ground before the tent.* ATHENA *appears from above.*)

ATHENA

SON of Laertes, ever do I behold thee
Scheming to snatch some vantage o'er thy foes.
And now among the tents that guard the ships
Of Ajax, camped at the army's outmost verge,
Long have I watched thee hunting in his trail,
And scanning his fresh prints, to learn if now
He be within or forth. Skilled in the chase
Thou seemest, as a keen-nosed Spartan hound.
For the man but now has passed within, his face
And slaughterous hands streaming with sweat and blood.
No further need for thee to peer about
Inside these doors. But say what eager quest
Is thine, that I who know may give thee light.

ODYSSEUS

Voice of Athena, dearest of Gods to me,
How clearly, though thou be invisible,
Do I hear thy call, and seize it with my soul,
As when a bronze-mouthed Tyrrhene trumpet sounds!
Rightly thou judgest that on a foe's trail,
Broad-shielded Ajax, I range to and fro.
Him, and no other, I have long been tracking.
This very night against us he has wrought
A deed incredible, if in truth 'tis he.
For we know nothing sure, but drift in doubt.
Gladly I assumed the burden of this task.
For not long since we found that our whole spoil
Had been destroyed, both herds and flocks, slaughtered

By some man's hand, their guardians dead beside them.
Now 'tis on him that all men lay this guilt:
And a scout who had seen him swiftly bounding
Across the plain alone with reeking sword,
Informed me and bore witness. I forthwith,
Darting in hot chase, now pick out his tracks,
But now, bewildered, know not whose they are.
Timely thou comest. As in past days, so
In days to come I am guided by thy hand.

ATHENA

I know it, Odysseus: so on the path betimes
A sentinel friendly to thy chase I came.

ODYSSEUS

Dear mistress, do I labour to good purpose?

ATHENA

Know 'twas by yonder man these deeds were wrought.

ODYSSEUS

And why did he so brandish a frenzied hand?

ATHENA

In grievous wrath for Achilles' panoply.

ODYSSEUS

Why then upon the flocks did he make this onslaught?

ATHENA

Your blood he deemed it was that stained his hand.

ODYSSEUS

Was this outrage designed against the Greeks?

ATHENA

He had achieved it too, but for my vigilance.

ODYSSEUS

What bold scheme could inspire such reckless daring?

ATHENA

By night he meant to steal on you alone.

ODYSSEUS

Did he come near us? Did he reach his goal?

ATHENA

He stood already at the two chiefs' doors.

ODYSSEUS

What then withheld his eager hand from bloodshed?

ATHENA

'Twas I restrained him, casting on his eyes
O'ermastering notions of that baneful ecstasy,
That turned his rage on flocks and mingled droves
Of booty yet unshared, guarded by herdsmen.
Then plunging amid the thronging horns he slew,
Smiting on all sides; and one while he fancied
The Atreidae were the captives he was slaughtering,
Now 'twas some other chief on whom he fell.
And I, while thus he raved in maniac throes,
Urged him on, drove him into the baleful toils.
Thereafter, when he had wearied of such labours,
He bound with thongs such oxen as yet lived,
With all the sheep, and drove them to his tents,
As though his spoil were men, not hornèd cattle.
Now lashed together in the hut he tortures them.
But to thee too will I expose this madness,
That seeing thou mayst proclaim it to all the Greeks.
Boldly await him here, nor apprehend
Mischance; for I will turn aside his eyes,
Foiling his vision lest he see thy face.
(*She calls to* AJAX *within the tent.*)
Hearken, thou who art pinioning with cords
The wrists of captives; hither, I bid thee, come.
Thou, Ajax, hear me: come to thy tent's door.

ODYSSEUS

What dost thou, Athena? Do not summon him forth.

ATHENA

Abide in silence. Earn not the name of coward.

ODYSSEUS

Nay, by the Gods, let him remain within.

ATHENA

What dost thou dread? Was he not once a man?

ODYSSEUS
Yes, and to me a foeman, and still is.

ATHENA
To mock foes, is not that the sweetest mockery?

ODYSSEUS
I am content he should remain indoors.

ATHENA
To look upon a madman art thou afeard?

ODYSSEUS
Had he been sane, no fear had made me shrink.

ATHENA
Even now he shall not see thee, near as thou art.

ODYSSEUS
How so, if still with the same eyes he sees?

ATHENA
His orbs will I make dark, though vision is theirs.

ODYSSEUS
Well, all is possible, when 'tis a god contrives.

ATHENA
Stand then silent, abiding as thou art.

ODYSSEUS
Stay I must; yet I fain would be far hence.

ATHENA
Ho, Ajax! Once again I summon thee.
So slight is thy regard for thine ally?
(AJAX *appears in the tent door, with a blood-stained scourge in his hand.*)

AJAX
Oh hail, Athena! Hail thou Zeus-born maid!
Nobly hast thou stood by me. Now will I crown thee
With trophies all of gold for this rich conquest.

ATHENA
Thy words are welcome. But now tell me this:
Hast thou dyed well thy sword in the Argive host?

AJAX

Such vaunt is mine. I disclaim not that glory.

ATHENA

Against the Atreidae didst thou arm thy hand?

AJAX

So that Ajax nevermore shall they insult.

ATHENA

The men are dead, if rightly I take thy meaning.

AJAX

Yes, dead. Now let them rob me of my arms.

ATHENA

'Tis well. And what then of Laertes' son?
In what plight does he stand? Or has he escaped thee?

AJAX

Wouldst thou know where is that accursèd fox?

ATHENA

Even so—Odysseus, thine old adversary.

AJAX

Goddess, a most dear captive in my tent
He sits. I do not mean him to die yet.

ATHENA

Till thou hast done what, gained what further vantage?

AJAX

Till bound fast to a pillar beneath my roof—

ATHENA

What evil wilt thou inflict on the poor wretch?

AJAX

His back the scourge must crimson ere he dies.

ATHENA

Nay, do not torture so the wretched man.

AJAX

Athena, in all else will I do thy will;
But his shall be no other doom than this.

ATHENA

Thou then, since thy delight is to act thus,
Smite, spare not, abate nought of thy intent.

AJAX

To my work I return: and thus I charge thee,
As now, so always fight thou upon my side.
(AJAX *goes back into the tent.*)

ATHENA

Seest thou, Odysseus, how great the strength of gods?
Whom couldst thou find more prudent than this man,
Or whom in act more valiant, when need called?

ODYSSEUS

I know none nobler; and I pity him
In his misery, albeit he is my foe,
Since he is yoked fast to an evil doom.
My own lot I regard no less than his.
For I see well, nought else are we but mere
Phantoms, all we that live, mere fleeting shadows.

ATHENA

Warned therefore by his fate, never do thou
Thyself utter proud words against the gods;
Nor swell with insolence, if thou shouldst vanquish
Some rival by main strength or by wealth's power.
For a day can bring all mortal greatness low,
And a day can lift it up. But the gods love
The wise of heart, the froward they abhor.

(ATHENA *vanishes and* ODYSSEUS *departs. The* CHORUS OF SALAMINIANS *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Son of Telamon, lord of Salamis' isle,
On its wave-washed throne mid the breaking sea,
I rejoice when fair are thy fortunes:
But whene'er thou art smitten by the stroke of Zeus,
Or the vehement blame of the fierce-tongued Greeks,
Then sore am I grieved, and for fear I quake,
As a fluttering dove with a scared eye.
Even so by rumour murmuring loud
Of the night late-spent our ears are assailed.
'Tis a tale of shame, how thou on the plains

Where the steeds roam wild, didst ruin the Danaan
Flocks and herds,
Our spear-won booty as yet unshared,
With bright sword smiting and slaughtering.
Such now are the slanders Odysseus forges
And whispers abroad into all men's ears,
Winning easy belief: so specious the tale
He is spreading against thee; and each new hearer
Rejoices more than he who told,
Exulting in thy degradation.
For the shaft that is aimed at the noble of soul
Smites home without fail: but whoe'er should accuse *me*
Of such misdeeds, no faith would he win.
'Tis the stronger whom creeping jealousy strikes.
Yet small men reft of help from the mighty
Can ill be trusted to guard their walls.
Best prosper the lowly in league with the great;
And the great have need to be served by the less.
But none to the knowledge of such plain truths
May lead minds witless and froward.
Even such are the men who murmur against thee:
And vainly without thine aid, O King,
We strive to repel their accusing hate.
For whene'er they are safe from the scorn of thy glance,
They chatter and screech like bids in a flock:
But smitten with dread of the powerful vulture,
Doubtless at once, should'st thou but appear,
They will cower down dumbly in silence.

strophe

Was it the Tauric Olympian Artemis,
(Oh, the dread rumour of woe,
Parent of my grievous shame!)
Who drove thee forth to slaughter the herds of the people,
In wrath perchance for some unpaid-for victory,
Whether defrauded of glorious spoil, or offerings
Due for a stag that was slain?
Or did the bronze-clad Demon of battle, aggrieved
On him who scorned the might of his succouring spear,
Plot revenge by nightly deception?

antistrophe

Ne'er of itself had thy heart, son of Telamon,
Strayed into folly so far

As to murder flocks and herds.
Escape from heaven-sent madness is none: yet Apollo
And Zeus avert these evil rumours of the Greeks.
But should the story be false, these crafty slanders
Spread by the powerful kings,
And by the child of the infamous Sisyphid line,
No more, my master, thus in the tent by the sea
Hide thy countenance, earning an ill fame.

epode

Nay, but arise from thy seat, where'er so long wrapt in
Brooding pause from the battle thou hast lurked: arise,
Heaven-high kindle the flame of death.
But the insolence of thy foes boldly
Thus wanders abroad in the wind-swept glens.
Meanwhile all men mocking
With venomous tongues taunt thee:
But grief in my heart wanes not.

(TECMESSA *enters. The following lines between* TECMESSA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

TECMESSA

Liegemen of Ajax, ship-companions,
Ye children of earth-sprung Erechthid race,
Lamentation is now our portion, to whom
Dear is the far-off house of Telamon,
Now that the stern and terrible Ajax
Lies whelmed by a storm
Of turbid wildering fury.

CHORUS

To what evil change from the day's woe now
Has night given birth?
Thou daughter of Phrygian Teleutas, speak;
For a constant love has valiant Ajax
Borne thee, his spear-won prisoner bride.
Then hide from us nought that thou knowest.

TECMESSA

How to utter a tale of unspeakable things!
For disastrous as death is the hap you will hear.
In the darkness of night madness has seized
Our glorious Ajax: he is ruined and lost.
Hereof in the tent may proof be seen;

Sword-slain victims in their own blood bathed,
By his hand sacrificially slaughtered.

CHORUS

strophe

What tidings of the fiery warrior tellest thou,
Not to be borne, nor yet to be disputed,
Rumoured abroad by the chiefs of the Danaan host,
Mightily still spreading and waxing!
Woe's me! I dread the horror to come. Yea, to a public death doomed
Will he die, if in truth *his* be the hand that wielded
The red sword that in frenzy hath slain the herds and mounted herdsmen.

TECMESSA

Ah me! Thence was it, thence that he came to me
Leading his captive flock from the pastures!
Thereof in the tent some did he slaughter,
Others hewed he asunder with slashing sword;
Then he caught up amain two white-footed rams,
Sliced off from the one both the head and the tongue,
And flings them away;
But the other upright to a pillar he binds,
Then seizing a heavy horse-harnessing thong
He smites with the whistling doubled lash,
Uttering fierce taunts which an evil fiend
No mere mortal could have taught him.

CHORUS

antistrophe

'Tis time that nów eách with shamefully muffled head
Forth from the camp should creep with stealthy footsteps.
Nay, on the ship let us muster, and benched at the oars
Over the waves launch her in swift flight.
Such angry threats sound in our ears hurled by the brother princes,
The Atreidae: and I quake, fearing a death by stoning,
The dread portion of all who would share our hapless master's ruin.

TECMESSA

Yet hope we: for ceased is the lightning's flash:
His rage dies down like a fierce south-wind.
But now, grown sane, new misery is his;

For on woes self-wrought he gazes aghast,
Wherein no hand but his own had share;
And with anguish his soul is afflicted.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, if 'tis ceased, there is good cause to hope.
Once 'tis past, of less moment is his frenzy.

TECMESSA

And which, were the choice thine, wouldst thou prefer,
To afflict thy friends and feel delight thyself,
Or to share sorrow, grieving with their grief?

LEADER

The twofold woe, lady, would be the greater.

TECMESSA

Then we, though plagued no more, are undone now.

LEADER

What mean thy words? Their sense is dark to me.

TECMESSA

Yonder man, while his spirit was diseased,
Himself had joy in his own evil plight,
Though to us, who were sane, he brought distress.
But now, since he has respite from his plague,
He with sore grief is utterly cast down,
And we likewise, no less than heretofore.
Are there not here two woes instead of one?

LEADER

Yes truly. And I fear, from some god came
This stroke; how else? if, now his frenzy is ceased,
His mind has no more ease than when it raged.

TECMESSA

'Tis even as I said, rest well assured.

LEADER

But how did this bane first alight upon him?
To us who share thy grief show what befell.

TECMESSA

Thou shalt hear all, as though thou hadst been present.
In the middle of the night, when the evening braziers

No longer flared, he took a two-edged sword,
And fain would sally upon an empty quest.
But I rebuked him, saying: "What doest thou,
Ajax? Why thus uncalled wouldst thou go forth?
No messenger has summoned thee, no trumpet
Roused thee. Nay, the whole camp is sleeping still."
But curtly he replied in well-worn phrase:
"Woman, silence is the grace of woman."
Thus schooled, I yielded; and he rushed out alone.
What passed outside the tent, I cannot tell.
But in he came, driving lashed together
Bulls, and shepherd dogs, and fleecy prey.
Some he beheaded, the wrenched-back throats of some
He slit, or cleft their chines; others he bound
And tortured, as though men they were, not beasts.
Last, darting through the doors, as to some phantom
He tossed words, now against the Atreidae, now
Taunting Odysseus, piling up huge jeers
Of how he had gone and wreaked his scorn upon them.
Soon he rushed back within the tent, where slowly
And hardly to his reason he returned.
And gazing round on the room filled with havoc,
He struck his head and cried out; then amidst
The wrecks of slaughtered sheep a wreck he fell,
And sat clutching his hair with tight-clenched nails.
There first for a long while he crouched speechless;
Then did he threaten me with fearful threats,
If I revealed not all that had befallen him,
Asking what meant the plight wherein he lay.
And I, friends, terror-stricken, told him all
That had been done, so far as I had knowledge.
Forthwith he broke forth into bitter wailing,
Such as I ne'er had heard from him before
For always had he held that such laments
Befitted cowards only, and low-souled men:
But uttering no shrill cries, he would express
His grief in low groans, as of a moaning bull.
But now prostrate beneath so great a woe,
Not tasting food nor drink, he sits among
The sword-slain beasts, motionless where he sank.
And plainly he meditates some baleful deed,
For so portend his words and lamentations.
But, O friends!—'twas for this cause I came forth—

Enter and help, if help at all you can:
For by friends' words men so bestead are won.

LEADER

Child of Teleutas, fearful are thy tidings,
That our prince has been maddened by his griefs.

AJAX (*within*)

Alas! Woe, woe!

TECMESSA

Soon, I fear, worse will follow. Heard you not?
'Twas Ajax. Oh, how dreadful was that cry.

AJAX

Alas! Woe, woe!

LEADER

He seems either still frenzied, or else grieving
For his past frenzies, now he sees their work.

AJAX

Alas! My son, my son!

TECMESSA

Woe's me! Eurysaces, 'tis for thee he calls.
What can he purpose?—Where art thou?—Ah, woe!

AJAX

Teucer, come!—Where is Teucer? Will he never
Come back from cattle-raiding?—while I perish!

LEADER

He seems in his right mind. But open the doors.
Perhaps even the sight of me may sober him.

(*She opens the doors of the tent.* AJAX *is revealed sitting among the slain beasts.*)

TECMESSA

See, I have opened. You may now behold
What he has done, and in what plight he lies.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
My shipmates and friends, you that alone to me
Loyal and true remain, of all friends alone,

Behold how great a billow lately rising from the storm of blood
Surging around engulphs me!

LEADER

Ah me, too true, it seems, was thy report.
This sight reveals the work of no sane mind.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
My mates, skilled and tried in brave seamanship,
Ye who embarking drove the wave-cleaving oar,
In you, in you alone I see a help and refuge from despair.
Smite me, and spill my blood too.

LEADER

Keep silence from dread words; nor curing ill
By ill, so swell the misery of this curse.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Behold now the bold, the man stout of heart,
Who ne'er shrank in fight agáinst fóes—behold
How I have spent my rage on beasts that feared no harm!
Ah me, the mockery! To what shame am I brought low!

TECMESSA

Ajax, my master, I entreat thee, speak not so.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Away hence, I command thee! Take thyself elsewhere.
Aiai! Aiai!

LEADER

Oh, by the Gods, we pray thee, yield to wisdom's voice.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Oh, wretch that I was to allow
Those cursèd foes to slip from my hands, and assaulting
Hornèd kine and goodly flocks, madly to spill
Their life in streams of dark blood!

LEADER

Why still be afflicted, now the deed is done past cure?
Never can these things be as though they had not been.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Thou áll-spýing knave, of áll deéds of shame
The prompt, easy tool, Odysseus the wise!

Villain, of all the camp the most foul and vile!
Huge laughter doubtless shakes thee now for sheer delight.

LEADER

As God appoints, so every man laughs or laments.

AJAX (*chanting*)

Would I might meet him, crushed and broken though I be.
Alas! Woe, woe!

LEADER

Speak no proud words. Seest thou not to what woe thou art sunk?

AJAX (*chanting*)

O Zeus, of my fathers the sire,
Might I but kill that hateful and crafty dissembler,
Yea, and those two brother kings, partners in pride,
Then last myself too perish!

TECMESSA

If thus thou prayest, pray therewith for me, that I
Die with thee. Why, when thou art dead, should I live on?

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
Shadow that art my light!
Erebus, oh to me verily bright as day!
Receive, receive me yóur hábitant.
Receive me now no more worthy to seek help of the gods,
Nor any more from fellow mortal men to claim kindness:
No, but she the strong
Zeus-born deity
Miserably tortures me.
Whither should I then flee?
Whither seek for rest?
Since my former glory is gone, my friends,
With yonder victims, yonder spoils by frenzy won,
Since all the host with swords uplifted
Sternly would slay me.

TECMESSA

Ah, woe is me! from such a noble warrior
To hear such words as once he ne'er had deigned to speak!

AJAX (*chanting*)

Alas!
Billowy paths of foam,
Eddying caves, and ye coppices by the shore,
A weary, weary time tarrying here
Beneath the walls of Troy me have you kept, but from this hour
Alive you shall not keep me. Truth I speak: let none doubt it.
O Scamander's wave,
Stream whose neighbouring flow
Oft have the Argives blest,
Never, nevermore
Me shall you behold,
Me (a proud word will I utter now)
Whose peer in battle Troy has never seen yet come
From Hellas' land: but now dishonoured
Thus am I prostrate.

LEADER

In truth I know not how to restrain thy speech, nor yet
To suffer it; so grievous is thy couch of woe.

AJAX

Aiai! [1] Who ever would have thought my name
Would harmonise so aptly with my woes?
For now well may I wail that sound out twice,
Yea thrice; such woeful destinies are mine,
Whose father from this land of Ida won
Fame's noblest guerdon over the whole host,
And crowned with praises only sailed back home; [2]
But I, his son, who to the self-same Troy
Came after him, in might no less than he,
Nor rendering meaner service by my deeds,
Dishonoured by the Argives perish thus.
Yet this methinks I know for truth, were now
Achilles living and called on to adjudge
As the award of valour his own arms,
No man's hand would have grasped them before mine.
But now the Atreidae to a scheming knave
Have dealt them, thrusting by my valiant deeds.
And if these eyes, these wits had not in frenzy
Swerved from my purpose, never would they thus
Pervert judgment against another man.
But the irresistible fierce-eyed goddess, even

As I was arming my right hand to slay them,
Foiled me, smiting me with a maddening plague,
So that I stained my hand butchering these cattle.
Thus my foes mock me, escaped beyond my reach,
Through no goodwill of mine: but if a god
Thwart vengeance, even the base may escape the nobler.
And what should I now do, who manifestly
To Heaven am hateful; whom the Greeks abhor,
Whom every Trojan hates, and this whole land?
Shall I desert the beached ships, and abandoning
The Atreidae, sail home o'er the Aegean sea?
With what face shall I appear before my father
Telamon? How will *he* find heart to look
On me, stripped of my championship in war,
That mighty crown of fame that once was his?
No, that I dare not. Shall I then assault
Troy's fortress, and alone against them all
Achieve some glorious exploit and then die?
No, I might gratify the Atreidae thus.
That must not be. Some scheme let me devise
Which may prove to my aged sire that I,
His son, at least by nature am no coward.
For 'tis base for a man to crave long life
Who endures never-varying misery.
What joy can be in day that follows day,
Bringing us close then snatching us from death?
As of no worth would I esteem that man
Who warms himself with unsubstantial hopes.
Nobly to live, or else nobly to die
Befits proud birth. There is no more to say.

LEADER

The word thou hast uttered, Ajax, none shall call
Bastard, but the true offspring of thy soul.
Yet pause. Let those who love thee overrule
Thy resolution. Put such thoughts aside.

TECMESSA

O my lord Ajax, of all human ills
Greatest is fortune's wayward tyranny.
Of a free father was I born the child,
One rich and great as any Phrygian else.
Now am I a slave; for so the gods, or rather

Thy warrior's hand, would have it. Therefore since
I am thy bedfellow, I wish thee well,
And I entreat thee by domestic Zeus,
And by the embraces that have made me thine,
Doom me not to the cruel taunts of those
Who hate thee, left a bond-slave in strange hands.
For shouldst thou perish and forsake me in death,
That very day assuredly I too
Shall be seized by the Argives, with thy son
To endure henceforth the portion of a slave.
Then one of my new masters with barbed words
Shall wound me scoffing: "See the concubine
Of Ajax, who was mightiest of the host,
What servile tasks are hers who lived so daintily!"
Thus will men speak, embittering my hard lot,
But words of shame for thee and for thy race.
Nay, piety forbid thee to forsake
Thy father in his drear old age—thy mother
With her sad weight of years, who many a time
Prays to the gods that thou come home alive.
And pity, O king, thy son, who without thee
To foster his youth, must live the orphaned ward
Of loveless guardians. Think how great a sorrow
Dying thou wilt bequeath to him and me.
For I have nothing left to look to more
Save thee. By thy spear was my country ravaged;
And by another stroke did fate lay low
My mother and my sire to dwell with Hades.
Without thee then what fatherland were mine?
What wealth? On thee alone rests all my hope.
O take thought for me too. Do we not owe
Remembrance, where we have met with any joy?
For kindness begets kindness evermore
But he who from whose mind fades the memory
Of benefits, noble is he no more.

LEADER

Ajax, would that thy soul would feel compassion,
As mine does; so wouldst thou approve her words.

AJAX

Verily my approval shall she win,
If only she find heart to do my bidding.

TECMESSA
Dear Ajax, in all things will I obey.

AJAX
Then bring me here my son, for I would see him.

TECMESSA
Nay, but I sent him from me in my fears.

AJAX
During my late affliction, is that thy meaning?

TECMESSA
Lest by ill chance he should meet thee and so perish.

AJAX
Yes, that would have been worthy of my fate.

TECMESSA
That at least I was watchful to avert.

AJAX
I praise thine act and the foresight thou hast shown.

TECMESSA
Since that is so, what shall I do to serve thee?

AJAX
Let me speak to him and behold his face.

TECMESSA
He is close by in the attendants' charge.

AJAX
Why is his coming then so long delayed?

TECMESSA (*calling*)
My son, thy father calls thee.—Bring him thither
Whichever of you is guiding the child's steps.

AJAX
Is the man coming? Has he heard thy call?

TECMESSA
See, he is here already with the child.
(*An attendant enters, leading the child,* EURYSACES.)

AJAX

Lift him up, lift him hither. He will not shrink
In terror at sight of yonder new-spilt blood,
If he be rightly mine, his father's son.
Early must he be broken to his sire's
Stern rugged code, and grow like-natured with him.
O son, mayst thou prove happier than thy father,
In all else like him, and thou'lt prove not base.
Yet even now might I envy thee herein,
That of these woes thou hast no sense at all.
For the life that is unconscious is most sweet—
Until we learn what joy and sorrow are.
But that once learnt, then midst thy father's foes
Thou must show what thou art, and of what breed.
Till then be nurtured on soft airs, cherishing
Thy tender life, and be thy mother's joy.
None of the Greeks, I know, will do thee wrong
With cruel outrage, even though I be gone.
So trusty a guardian will I leave thee, Teucer,
Who will not stint his loving care, though now
He is gone far away, in chase of foes.
But you, my warriors, comrades in seafaring,
On you too I impose this task of love;
And fail not to announce my will to Teucer,
That to my home he take the child and show him
To Telamon and my mother Eriboea,
That henceforth he may comfort their old age.
And charge him that no game-steward make my arms
A prize for the Greeks—nor he who ruined me.
But this take thou, my son Eurysaces;
Hold it and wield it by its firm-stitched thong,
This sevenfold spear-proof shield, whence comes thy name.
But else with me my arms shall be interred.
(*Speaking now to* TECMESSA)
Come, take the child hence quickly, and bolt the doors:
And let there be no weeping and lamenting
Before the hut. Women love tears too well.
Close quickly. It is not for a skilful leech
To drone charms o'er a wound that craves the knife.

LEADER

I am fearful, listening to this eager mood.
The sharp edge of thy tongue, I like it not.

TECMESSA

O my lord Ajax, what art thou purposing?

AJAX

Question me not. To be discreet is best.

TECMESSA

Ah me, heavy is my heart. Now by thy child,
By the gods, I entreat, forsake us not.

AJAX

Vex me no further. Know'st thou not that I
To the gods owe no duty any more?

TECMESSA

Utter no proud words.

AJAX

Speak to those who listen.

TECMESSA

Wilt thou not heed?

AJAX

Too much thou hast spoken already.

TECMESSA

Yes, through my fears, O king.

AJAX

Close the doors quickly.

TECMESSA

For the gods' love, relent.

AJAX

'Tis a foolish hope,
If thou shouldst now propose to school my mood.

(*The doors are closed upon* AJAX. TECMESSA *goes out with* EURYSACES.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O famed Salamis, thou amidst
Breaking surges abidest ever
Blissful, a joy to the eyes of all men.
But I the while long and wearily tarrying

Through countless months still encamped on the fields of Ida
In misery here have made my couch,
By time broken and worn,
In dread waiting the hour
When I shall enter at last the terrible shadow abode of Hades.

antistrophe 1

Now dismays me a new despair,
This incurable frenzy (woe, ah
Woe's me!) cast by the gods on Ajax,
Whom thou of old sentest forth from thy shores, a strong
And valiant chief; but now, to his friends a sore grief,
Devouring his lonely heart he sits.
His once glorious deeds
Are now fallen and scorned,
Fallen to death without love from the loveless and pitiless sons of Atreus.

strophe 2

His mother, 'tis most like, burdened with many days,
And whitened with old age, when she shall hear how frenzy
Has smitten his soul to ruin,
Ailinon! ailinon!
Will break forth her despair, not as the nightingale's
Plaintive, tender lament, no, but in passion's wailing
Shrill-toned cries; and with fierce strokes
Wildly smiting her bosom,
In grief's anguish her hands will rend her grey locks.

antistrophe 2

Yea, better Hell should hide one who is sick in soul,
Though there be none than he sprung from a nobler lineage
Of the war-weary Greeks, yet
Strayed from his inbred mood
Now amidst alien thoughts dwells he a stranger.
Hapless father! alas, bitter the tale that waits thee,
Thy son's grievous affliction.
No life save his alone
Of Aeacid kings such a curse has ever haunted.

(AJAX *enters, carrying a sword. As he speaks,* TECMESSA *also enters.*)

AJAX

All things the long and countless lapse of time
Brings forth, displays, then hides once more in gloom.

Nought is too strange to look for; but the event
May mock the sternest oath, the firmest will.
Thus I, who late so strong, so stubborn seemed
Like iron dipped, yet now grow soft with pity
Before this woman, whom I am loath to leave
Midst foes a widow with this orphaned child.
But I will seek the meadows by the shore:
There will I wash and purge these stains, if so
I may appease Athena's heavy wrath.
Then will I find some lonely place, where I
May hide this sword, beyond all others cursed,
Buried where none may see it, deep in earth.
May night and Hades keep it there below.
For from that hour my hand accepted it,[8]
The gift of Hector, deadliest of my foes,
Nought from the Greeks towards me hath sped well.
So now I find that ancient proverb true,
Foes' gifts are no gifts: profit bring they none.
Therefore henceforth I study to obey
The Gods, and reverence the sons of Atreus.
Our rulers are they: we must yield. How else?
For to authority yield all things most dread
And mighty. Thus must Winter's snowy feet
Give place to Summer with her wealth of fruits;
And from her weary round doth Night withdraw,
That Day's white steeds may kindle heaven with light.
After fierce tempest calm will ever lull
The moaning sea; and Sleep, that masters all,
Binds life awhile, yet loosens soon the bond.
And who am I that I should not learn wisdom?
Of all men I, whom proof hath taught of late
How so far only should we hate our foes
As though we soon might love them, and so far
Do a friend service, as to one most like
Some day to prove our foe; since oftenest men
In friendship but a faithless haven find.
Thus well am I resolved. (*To* TECMESSA) Thou, woman, pass
Within, and pray the gods that all things so
May be accomplished as my heart desires.
And you, friends, heed my wishes as she doth;
And when he comes, bid Teucer he must guard
My rights at need, and withal stand your friend.
For now I go whither I needs must pass.

Do as I bid. Soon haply you shall hear,
With me, for all this misery, 'tis most well.

(AJAX *departs.* TECMESSA *goes into the tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

I thrill with rapture, flutter on wings of ecstasy.
Io, Io, Pan, Pan!
O Pan, Pan! from the stony ridge,
Snow-bestrewn of Cyllene's height
Appear roving across the waters,
O dance-ordering king of gods,
That thou mayst join me in flinging free
Fancy measures of Nysa and of Cnossus.
Yea for the dance I now am eager.
And over the far Icarian billows come, O king Apollo,
From Delos in haste, come thou,
Thy kindly power here in our midst revealing.

antistrophe

Ares hath lifted horror and anguish from our eyes.
Io, Io! Now again,
Now, O Zeus, can the bright and blithe
Glory of happier days return
To our swift-voyaging ships, for now
Hath Ajax wholly forgot his grief,
And all rites due to the gods he now
Fain would meetly perform with loyal worship.
Mighty is time to dwindle all things.
Nought would I call too strange for belief, when Ajax thus beyond hope
Hath learnt to repent his proud feuds,
And lay aside anger against the Atreidae.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

My friends, these tiding I would tell you first:
Teucer is present, from the Mysian heights
But now returned, and in the central camp
By all the Greeks at once is being reviled.
As he drew near they knew him from afar,
Then gathering around him one and all
With taunts assailed him from this side and that,
Calling him kinsman of that maniac,

That plotter against the host, saying that nought
Should save him; stoned and mangled he must die.
And so they had come to such a pitch that swords
Plucked from their sheaths stood naked in men's hands.
Yet when the strife ran highest, it was stayed
By words from the elders and so reconciled.
But where is Ajax? I must speak with him.
He whom it most concerns must be told all.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He is not within, but has just now gone forth
With a new purpose yoked to a new mood.

MESSENGER

Alas! Alas!
Then too late on this errand was I sped
By him who sent me; or I have proved too slow.

LEADER

What urgent need has been neglected here?

MESSENGER

Teucer forbade that Ajax should go forth
Outside his hut, till he himself should come.

LEADER

Well, he is gone. To wisest purpose now
His mind is turned, to appease heaven's wrath.

MESSENGER

These words of thine are filled with utter folly,
If there was truth in Calchas' prophecy.

LEADER

What prophecy? And what know you of this thing?

MESSENGER

Thus much I know, for by chance I was present.
Leaving the circle of consulting chiefs
Where sat the Atreidae, Calchas went aside,
And with kind purpose grasping Teucer's hand
Enjoined him that by every artifice
He should restrain Ajax within his tents
This whole day, and not leave him to himself,
If he wished ever to behold him alive.
For on this day alone, such were his words,

Would the wrath of divine Athena vex him.
For the overweening and unprofitable
Fall crushed by heaven-sent calamities
(So the seer spoke), whene'er one born a man
Has conceived thoughts too high for man's estate:
And this man, when he first set forth from home,
Showed himself foolish, when his father spoke to him
Wisely: "My son, seek victory by the spear;
But seek it always with the help of heaven."
Then boastfully and witlessly he answered:
"Father, with heaven's help a mere man of nought
Might win victory: but I, albeit without
Their aid, trust to achieve a victor's glory."
Such was his proud vaunt. Then a second time
Answering divine Athena, when she urged him
To turn a slaughterous hand upon his foes,
He gave voice to this dire, blasphemous boast:
"Goddess, stand thou beside the other Greeks.
Where I am stationed, no foe shall break through."
By such words and such thoughts too great for man
Did he provoke Athena's pitiless wrath.
But if he lives through this one day, perchance,
Should heaven be willing, we may save him yet.
So spoke the seer; and Teucer from his seat
No sooner risen, sent me with this mandate
For you to observe. But if we have been forestalled,
That man lives not, or Calchas is no prophet.

LEADER (*calling*)

Woful Tecmessa, woman born to sorrow,
Come forth and hear this man who tells of a peril
That grazes us too close for our mind's ease.

(TECMESSA *enters from the tent.*)

TECMESSA

Why alas do you break my rest again
After brief respite from relentless woes?

LEADER

Give hearing to this messenger, who brings
Tidings that grieve me of how Ajax fares.

TECMESSA

Ah me, what sayest thou, man? Are we undone?

MESSENGER

I know not of *thy* fortune; but for Ajax,
If he be gone abroad, my mind misgives.

TECMESSA

Yes, he is gone. I am racked to know thy meaning.

MESSENGER

Teucer commands you to keep him within doors,
And not to let him leave his tent alone.

TECMESSA

And where is Teucer, and why speaks he thus?

MESSENGER

He has but now returned, and he forebodes
That this going-forth will prove fatal to Ajax.

TECMESSA

Woe's me, alas! From whom has he learned this?

MESSENGER

From the seer, Thestor's son, this very day,
Which is fraught either with his death or life.

TECMESSA

Ah me, my friends, avert this threatening doom!
Speed some of you to hasten Teucer hither:
Others go search the bays, some west, some east,
And track my lord's ill-omened going-forth.
Yes, now I know I have been deceived by him,
And from his former favour quite cast out.
Alas, child, what shall I do? Sit still I must not:
But far as I have strength I too will go.
Let us start quickly: 'tis no time for loitering,
If we would save one who is in haste to die.

LEADER

I am ready, as not words alone shall prove,
But speed of act and foot to make words good.

(*The* CHORUS, TECMESSA *and* MESSENGER *go out. The scene changes to a lonely place by the sea-shore. Bushes and underbrush are in the background.* AJAX *enters alone.*)

AJAX

The slayer stands so that his edge may cleave
Most surely (if there be leisure for such thought),
Being the gift of Hector, of all friends
Most unloved, and most hateful to my sight.
Then it is planted in Troy's hostile soil,
New-sharpened on the iron-biting whet.
And heedfully have I planted it, that so
With a swift death it prove to me most kind.
Thus have I made all ready. Next be thou
The first, O Zeus, to aid me, as is right.
It is no mighty boon that I shall crave.
Send some announcer of the evil news
To Teucer, that he first may lift me up,
When I have fallen upon this reeking sword,
Lest ere he come some enemy should espy me
And cast me forth to dogs and birds a prey.
This, O Zeus, I entreat thee, and likewise call
On Hermes, guide to the underworld, to lay me
Asleep without a struggle, at one swift bound,
When I have thrust my heart through with this sword.
Next I call on those maidens ever-living
And ever watchful of all human miseries,
The dread swift-striding Erinyes, that they mark
How by the Atreidae I have been destroyed:
And these vile men by a vile doom utterly
May they cut off, even as they see me here.
Come, O ye swift avenging Erinyes,
Spare not, touch with affliction the whole host.
And thou, whose chariot mounts up the steep sky,
Thou Sun, when on the land where I was born
Thou shalt look down, check thy gold-spangled rein,
And announce my disasters and my doom
To my aged sire and her who nurtured me.
She, woful woman, when she hears these tidings
Will wail out a loud dirge through all the town.
But I waste labour with this idle moan.
The act must now be done, and that with speed.
O Death, Death, come now and look upon me.—
No, 'tis there I shall meet and speak to thee.
But thee, bright daylight which I now behold,
And Helios in his chariot I accost
For this last time of all, and then no more.

O sunlight! O thou hallowed soil, my own
Salamis, stablished seat of my sire's hearth,
And famous Athens, with thy kindred race,
And you, ye springs and streams, and Trojan plains,
Farewell, all ye who have sustained my life.
This is the last word Ajax speaks to you.
All else in Hades to the dead will I say.
(*He falls on his sword. His body lies partially concealed by the underbrush.* SEMI-CHORUS 1 *enters.*)

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
'Tis toil on toil, and toil again.
Where! where!
Where have not my footsteps been?
And still no place reveals the secret of my search.
But hark!
There again I hear a sound.

(SEMI-CHORUS 2 *enters.*)

SEMI-CHORUS 2 (*chanting*)
'Tis we, the ship-companions of your voyage.

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
Well how now?

SEMI-CHORUS 2 (*chanting*)
We have searched the whole coast westward from the ship.

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
You have found nought?

SEMI-CHORUS 2 (*chanting*)
A deal of toil, but nothing more to see.

SEMI-CHORUS 1 (*chanting*)
Neither has he been found along the path
That leads from the eastern glances of the sun.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe
From whom, oh from whom? what hard son of the waves,
Plying his weary task without thought of sleep,
Or what Olympian nymph of hill or stream that flows
Down to the Bosporus' shore,
Might I have tidings of my lord
Wandering somewhere seen

Fierce of mood? Grievous it is
When I have toiled so long, and ranged far and wide
Thus to fail, thus to have sought in vain.
Still the afflicted hero nowhere may I find.

(TECMESSA *enters and discovers the body.*)

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Whose cry was it that broke from yonder copse?

TECMESSA

Alas, woe is me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

It is the hapless spear-won bride I see,
Tecmessa, steeped in that wail's agony.

TECMESSA

I am lost, destroyed, made desolate, my friends.

LEADER

What is it? Speak.

TECMESSA

Ajax, our master, newly slaughtered lies
Yonder, a hidden sword sheathed in his body.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for my lost hopes of home!
Woe's me, thou hast slain me, my king,
Me thy shipmate, hapless man!
Woful-souled woman too!

TECMESSA

Since thus it is with him, 'tis mine to wail.

LEADER

By whose hand has he wrought this luckless deed?

TECMESSA

By his own hand, 'tis evident. This sword
Whereon he fell, planted in earth, convicts him.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for my blind folly! Lone in thy blood thou liest, from friends' help afar.
And I the wholly witless, the all unwary,
Forbore to watch thee. Where, where
Lieth the fatally named, intractable Ajax?

TECMESSA

None must behold him. I will shroud him wholly
In this enfolding mantle; for no man
Who loved him could endure to see him thus
Through nostrils and through red gash spouting up
The darkened blood from his self-stricken wound.
Ah me, what shall I do? What friend shall lift thee?
Where is Teucer? Timely indeed would he now come,
To compose duly his slain brother's corpse.
O hapless Ajax, who wast once so great,
Now even thy foes might dare to mourn thy fall.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

antistrophe

'Twas fate's will, alas, 'twas fate then for thou
Stubborn of soul at length to work out a dark
Doom of ineffable miseries. Such the dire
Fury of passionate hate
I heard thee utter fierce of mood
Railing at Atreus' sons
Night by night, day by day.
Verily then it was the sequence of woes
First began, when as the prize of worth
Fatally was proclaimed the golden panoply.

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

A loyal grief pierces thy heart, I know.

TECMESSA

Alas, woe, woe!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woman, I marvel not that thou shouldst wail
And wail again, reft of a friend so dear.

TECMESSA

'Tis thine to surmise, mine to feel, too surely.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

'Tis even so.

TECMESSA

Ah, my child, to what bondage are we come,
Seeing what cruel taskmasters will be ours.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah me, at what dost thou hint?
What ruthless, unspeakable wrong
From the Atreidae fearest thou?
But may heaven avert that woe!

TECMESSA

Ne'er had it come to this save by heaven's will.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Yes, too great to be borne this heaven-sent burden.

TECMESSA

Yet such the woe which the dread child of Zeus,
Pallas, has gendered for Odysseus' sake.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Doubtless the much-enduring hero in his dark spy's soul exults mockingly,
And laughs with mighty laughter at these agonies
Of a frenzied spirit. Shame! Shame!
Sharers in glee at the tale are the royal Atreidae.

TECMESSA

Well, let them mock and glory in his ruin.
Perchance, though while he lived they wished not for him,
They yet shall wail him dead, when the spear fails them.
Men of ill judgment oft ignore the good
That lies within their hands, till they have lost it.
More to their grief he died than to their joy,
And to his own content. All his desire
He now has won, that death for which he longed.
Why then should they deride him? 'Tis the gods
Must answer for his death, not these men, no.
Then let Odysseus mock him with empty taunts.
Ajax is no more with them; but has gone,
Leaving to me despair and lamentation.

TEUCER (*from without*)
Alas, woe, woe!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Keep silence! Is it Teucer's voice I hear
Lifting a dirge over this tragic sight?
(TEUCER *enters.*)

TEUCER
O brother Ajax, to mine eyes most dear,
Can it be thou hast fared as rumour tells?

LEADER
Yes, he is dead, Teucer: of that be sure.

TEUCER
Alas, how then can I endure my fate!

LEADER
Since thus it is . . .

TEUCER
O wretched, wretched me!

LEADER
Thou hast cause to moan.

TEUCER
O swift and cruel woe!

LEADER
Too cruel, Teucer!

TEUCER
Woe is me! But say—
His child—where shall I find him? Tell me where.

LEADER
Alone within the tent.

TEUCER (*to* TECMESSA)
Then with all speed
Go, bring him thither, lest some foe should snatch him
Like a whelp from a lioness bereaved.
Away! See it done quickly! All men are wont
To insult over the dead, once they lie low.
(TECMESSA *departs.*)

LEADER

Yes, Teucer, while he lived, did he not charge thee
To guard his son from harm, as now thou dost?

TEUCER

O sight most grievous to me of all sights
That ever I have looked on with my eyes!
And hatefullest of all paths to my soul
This path that now has led me to thy side,
O dearest Ajax, when I heard thy fate,
While seeking thee I tracked thy footsteps out.
For a swift rumour, as from some god, ran
Through the Greek host that thou wast dead and gone.
While yet far off I heard it, and groaned deep
In anguish; now I see, and my life dies.
Ay me!
Uncover. Let me behold woe's very worst.
(*The cover is lifted from the body.*)
O ghastly sight! victim of ruthless courage!
What miseries hast thou dying sown for me!
Whither, among what people, shall I go,
Who in thy troubles failed to give thee succour?
Oh doubtless Telamon, thy sire and mine,
With kind and gracious face is like to greet me,
Returned without thee: how else?—he who is wont
Even at good news to smile none the sweeter.
What will he keep back? What taunt not hurl forth
Against the bastard of a spear-won slave,
Him who through craven cowardice betrayed
Thee, beloved Ajax—or by guile, that so
I might inherit thy kingdom and thy house.
So will he speak, a passionate man, grown peevish
In old age, quick to wrath without a cause.
Then shall I be cast off, a banished man,
Proclaimed no more a freeman but a slave.
Such is the home that waits me; while at Troy
My foes are many, my well-wishers few.
All this will be my portion through thy death.
Ah me, what shall I do? How draw thee, brother,
From this fell sword, on whose bright murderous point
Thou hast breathed out thy soul? See how at last
Hector, though dead, was fated to destroy thee!
Consider, I pray, the doom of these two men.

Hector, with that same girdle Ajax gave him
Was lashed fast to Achilles' chariot rail
And mangled till he had gasped forth his life.
And 'twas from him that Ajax had this gift,
The blade by which he perished and lies dead.
Was it not some Erinys forged this sword,
And Hades the grim craftsman wrought that girdle?
I at least would maintain that the gods plan
These things and all things ever for mankind.
But whosoever's judgment likes not this,
Let him uphold his doctrine as I mine.

LEADER

Speak no more, but take counsel how to inter
Our dear lord, and what now it were best to say:
For 'tis a foe I see. Perchance he comes
To mock our misery, villain that he is.

TEUCER

What chieftain of the host do you behold?

LEADER

Menelaus, for whose sake we voyaged hither.

TEUCER

'Tis he. I know him well, now he is near.

(MENELAUS *enters with his retinue.*)

MENELAUS

You, Sir, I warn you, raise not yonder corpse
For burial, but leave it as it lies.

TEUCER

For what cause do you waste such swelling words?

MENELAUS

'Tis *my* will, and *his* will who rules the host.

TEUCER

Let us know then what pretext you allege.

MENELAUS

We hoped that we had brought this man from home
To be a friend and champion for the Greeks:
But a worse than Phrygian foe on trial we found him.
Devising death for the whole host, by night

He sallied forth against us, armed for slaughter.
And had not some god baffled this exploit,
Ours would have been the lot which now is his:
While we lay slain by a most shameful doom,
He would have still been living. But his outrage,
Foiled by a god, has fallen on sheep and herds.
Wherefore there lives no man so powerful
That he shall lay this corpse beneath a tomb;
But cast forth somewhere upon the yellow sands
It shall become food for the sea-shore birds.
Then lift not up your voice in threatening fury.
If while he lived we could not master him,
Yet in death will we rule him, in your despite,
Guiding him with our hands, since in his life
At no time would he hearken to my words.
Yet 'tis a sign of wickedness, when a subject
Deigns not to obey those placed in power above him.
For never can the laws be prosperously
Stablished in cities where awe is not found;
Nor may a camp be providently ruled
Without the shield of dread and reverence.
Yea, though a man be grown to mighty bulk,
Let him look lest some slight mischance o'erthrow him.
He with whom awe and reverence abide,
Doubt not, will flourish in security.
But where outrage and licence are not checked,
Be sure that state, though sped by prosperous winds,
Some day at last will founder in deep seas.
Yes, fear should be established in due season.
Dream not that we can act as we desire,
Yet avoid payment of the price in pain.
Well, fortune goes by turns. This man was fiery
And insolent once: 'tis mine now to exult.
I charge thee, bury him not, lest by that act
Thou thyself shouldst be digging thine own grave.

LEADER

Menelaus, do not first lay down wise precepts,
Then thyself offer outrage to the dead.

TEUCER (*to the* CHORUS)

Never, friends, shall I marvel any more,
If one of low birth acts injuriously,

When they who are accounted nobly born
Can utter such injurious calumnies.

(*To* MENELAUS)

Come, once more speak. You say you *brought* him hither?
Took him to be a champion of the Greeks?
Did he not sail as his own master, freely?
How are *you* his chieftain? How have *you* the right
To lord it o'er the folk he brought from home?
As Sparta's lord you came, not as *our* master.
In no way was it your prerogative
To rule him, any more than he could you.
As vassal of others you sailed hither, not
As captain of us all, still less of Ajax.
Go, rule those whom you *may* rule: chastise *them*
With proud words. But this man, though you forbid me,
Aye, and your fellow-captain, by just right
Will I lay in his grave, scorning your threats.
It was not for the sake of your lost wife
He came to Troy, like your toil-broken serfs,
But for the sake of oaths that he had sworn,
Not for yours. What cared *he* for nobodies?
Then come again and bring more heralds hither,
And the captain of the host. For such as you
I would not turn my head, for all your bluster.

LEADER

Such speech I like not, either, in peril's midst:
For harsh words rankle, be they ne'er so just.

MENELAUS

This bowman, it seems, has pride enough to spare.

TEUCER

Yes, 'tis no mean craft I have made my own.

MENELAUS

How big would be your boasts, had you a shield!

TEUCER

Shieldless, I would outmatch you panoplied.

MENELAUS

How terrible a courage dwells within your tongue!

TEUCER
He may be bold of heart whose side right favours.

MENELAUS
Is it right that my assassin should be honoured?

TEUCER
Assassin? How strange, if, though slain, you live!

MENELAUS
Heaven saved me: I was slain in his intent.

TEUCER
Do not dishonour then the gods who saved you.

MENELAUS
What, I rebel against the laws of heaven?

TEUCER
Yes, if you come to rob the dead of burial.

MENELAUS
My own foes! How could I endure such wrong?

TEUCER
Did Ajax ever confront you as your foe?

MENELAUS
He loathed me, and I him, as well you know.

TEUCER
Because to defraud him you intrigued for votes.

MENELAUS
It was the judges cast him, and not I.

TEUCER
Much secret villainy you could make seem fair.

MENELAUS
That saying will bring someone into trouble.

TEUCER
Not greater trouble than we mean to inflict.

MENELAUS
My one last word: this man must not have burial.

TEUCER.

Then hear my answer: burial he shall have.

MENELAUS

Once did I see a fellow bold of tongue,
Who had urged a crew to sail in time of storm;
Yet no voice had you found in him, when winds
Began to blow; but hidden beneath his cloak
The mariners might trample on him at will.
And so with you and your fierce railleries,
Perchance a great storm, though from a little cloud
Its breath proceed, shall quench your blatant outcry.

TEUCER.

And I once saw a fellow filled with folly,
Who gloried scornfully in his neighbour's woes.
So it came to pass that someone like myself,
And of like mood, beholding him spoke thus:
"Man, act not wickedly towards the dead;
Or, if thou dost, be sure that thou wilt rue it."
Thus did he monish that infatuate man.
And lo! yonder I see him; and as I think,
He is none else but thou. Do I speak riddles?

MENELAUS

I go. It were disgrace should any know
I had fallen to chiding where I might chastise.

TEUCER

Begone then. For to me 'twere worst disgrace
That I should listen to a fool's idle blustering.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue depart.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Soon mighty and fell will the strife be begun.
But speedily now, Teucer, I pray thee,
Seek some fit place for his hollow grave,
Which men's memories evermore shall praise,
As he lies there mouldering at rest.

(TECMESSA *enters with* EURYSACES.)

TEUCER

Look yonder, where the child and wife of Ajax
Are hastening hither in good time to tend
The funeral rites of his unhappy corpse.

My child, come hither. Stand near and lay thy hand
As a suppliant on thy father who begat thee.
And kneel imploringly with locks of hair
Held in thy hand—mine, and hers, and last thine—
The suppliant's treasure. But if any Greek
By violence should tear thee from this corpse,
For that crime from the land may he be cast
Unburied, and his whole race from the root
Cut off, even as I sever this lock.
There, take it, boy, and keep it. Let none seek
To move thee; but still kneel there and cling fast.
And you, like men, no women, by his side
Stand and defend him till I come again,
When I have dug his grave, though all forbid.

(TEUCER *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When will this agony draw to a close?
When will it cease, the last of our years of exile?
Years that bring me labour accurst of hurtling spears,
Woe that hath no respite or end,
But wide-spread over the plains of Troy
Works sorrow and shame for Hellas' sons.

antistrophe 1

Would he had vanished away from the earth,
Rapt to the skies, or sunk to devouring Hades,
He who first revealed to the Greeks the use of arms
Leagued in fierce confederate war!
Ah, toils eternally breeding toils!
Yea, he was the fiend who wrought man's ruin.

strophe 2

The wretch accurst, what were his gifts?
Neither the glad, festival wreath,
Nor the divine, mirth-giving wine-cup;
No music of flutes, soothing and sweet:
Slumber by night, blissful and calm,
None he bequeathed us.
And love's joys, alas! love did he banish from me.
Here couching alone neglected,
With hair by unceasing dews drenched evermore, we curse
Thy shores, O cruel Ilium.

antistrophe 2

Erewhile against terror by night,
Javelin or sword, firm was our trust:
He was our shield, valiant Ajax.
But now a malign demon of fate
Claims him. Alas! When, when again
Shall joy befall me?
Oh once more to stand, where on the wooded headland
The ocean is breaking, under
The shadow of Sunium's height; thence could I greet from far
The divine city of Athens.

(TEUCER *enters, followed by* AGAMEMNON *and his retinue.*)

TEUCER

In haste I come; for the captain of the host,
Agamemnon, I have seen hurrying hither.
To a perverse tongue now will he give rein.

AGAMEMNON

Is it you, they tell me, have dared to stretch your lips
In savage raillery against us, unpunished?
'Tis you I mean, the captive woman's son.
Verily of well-born mother had you been bred,
Superb had been your boasts and high your strut,
Since you, being nought, have championed one who is nought,
Vowing that no authority is ours
By sea or land to rule the Greeks or you.
Are not these monstrous taunts to hear from slaves?
What was this man whose praise you vaunt so loudly?
Whither went he, or where stood he, where I was not?
Among the Greeks are there no men but he?
In evil hour, it seems, did we proclaim
The contest for Achilles' panoply,
If come what may Teucer is to call us knaves,
And if you never will consent, though worsted,
To accept the award that seemed just to most judges,
But either must keep pelting us with foul words,
Or stab us craftily in your rage at losing.
Where such discords are customary, never
Could any law be stablished and maintained,
If we should thrust the rightful winners by,
And bring the rearmost to the foremost place.
But such wrong must be checked. 'Tis not the big

Broad-shouldered men on whom we most rely;
No, 'tis the wise who are masters everywhere.
An ox, however large of rib, may yet
Be kept straight on the road by a little whip.
And this corrective, I perceive, will soon
Descend on you, unless you acquire some wisdom,
Who, though this man is dead, a mere shade now,
Can wag your insolent lips so freely and boldly.
Come to your senses: think what you are by birth.
Bring hither someone else, a man born free,
Who in your stead may plead your cause before us.
For when *you* speak, the sense escapes me quite:
I comprehend not your barbarian tongue.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Would that you both might learn wisdom and temperance.
There is no better counsel I can give you.

TEUCER

Alas! how soon gratitude to the dead
Proves treacherous and vanishes from men's minds,
If for thee, Ajax, this man has no more
The least word of remembrance, he for whom oft
Toiling in battle thou didst risk thy life.
But all that is forgotten and flung aside.
Thou who but now wast uttering so much folly,
Hast thou no memory left, how in that hour
When, pent within your lines, you were already
No more than men of nought, routed in battle,
He alone stood forth to save you, while the flames
Were blazing round the stern-decks of the ships
Already, and while Hector, leaping high
Across the trench, charged down upon the hulls?
Who checked this ruin? Was it not he, who nowhere
So much as stood beside thee, so thou sayest?
Would you deny he acted nobly there?
Or when again chosen by lot, unbidden,
Alone in single combat he met Hector?
For no runaway's lot did he cast in,
No lump of clammy earth, but such that first
It should leap lightly from the crested helm?
His were these exploits; and beside him stood
I, the slave, the barbarian mother's son.

Wretch, with what face can you fling forth such taunts?
Know you not that of old your father's father
Was Pelops, a barbarian, and a Phrygian?
That your sire Atreus set before his brother
A feast most impious of his own children's flesh?
And from a Cretan mother you were born,[4]
Whom when her father found her with a paramour,
He doomed her for dumb fishes to devour.
Being such, do you reproach *me* with my lineage?
Telamon is the father who begat me,
Who, as the foremost champion of the Greeks,
Won as his bride my mother, a princess
By birth, Laomedon's daughter: a chosen spoil
She had been given him by Alcmena's son.
Thus of two noble parents nobly born,
How should I shame one of my blood, whom now,
Laid low by such calamity, you would thrust
Unburied forth, and feel no shame to say it?
But of this be sure: wheresoever you may cast him,
Us three also with him will you cast forth.
For it beseems me in his cause to die
In sight of all, rather than for the sake
Of your wife—or your brother's should I say?
Look then not to my interest, but your own.
For if you assail me, you shall soon wish rather
To have been a coward than too bold against *me*.

(Odysseus *enters*.)

Leader

In good time, King Odysseus, hast thou come,
If 'tis thy purpose not to embroil but reconcile.

Odysseus

What is it, friends? Far off I heard high words
From the Atreidae over this hero's corpse.

Agamemnon

Royal Odysseus, but now from this man
We have been listening to most shameful taunts.

Odysseus

How shameful? I could find excuse for one
Who, when reviled, retorts with bitter words.

AGAMEMNON

Yes, I repaid his vile deeds with reviling.

ODYSSEUS

What has he done thee whereby thou art wronged?

AGAMEMNON

He says he will not leave yon corpse unhonoured
By sepulture, but will bury it in my spite.

ODYSSEUS

May now a friend speak out the truth, yet still
As ever ply his oar in stroke with thine?

AGAMEMNON

Speak: I should be witless else; for thee
Of all the Greeks I count the greatest friend.

ODYSSEUS

Then listen. For the gods' sake venture not
Thus ruthlessly to cast forth this man unburied:
And in no wise let violence compel thee
To such deep hate that thou shouldst tread down justice.
Once for me too this man was my worst foe,
From that hour when I won Achilles' arms;
Yet, though he was such towards me, I would not so
Repay him with dishonour as to deny
That of all Greeks who came to Troy, no hero
So valiant save Achilles have I seen.
So it is not just thou shouldst dishonour him.
Not him wouldst thou be wronging, but the laws
Of heaven. It is not righteousness to outrage
A brave man dead, not even though thou hate him.

AGAMEMNON

Thou, Odysseus, champion *him* thus against *me?*

ODYSSEUS

Yes; but I hated him while hate was honourable.

AGAMEMNON

Shouldst thou not also trample on him when dead?

ODYSSEUS

Atreides, glory not in dishonouring triumphs.

AGAMEMNON
'Tis hard for a king to act with piety.

ODYSSEUS
Yet not hard to respect a friend's wise counsel.

AGAMEMNON
A good man should obey those who bear rule.

ODYSSEUS
Relent. 'Tis no defeat to yield to friends.

AGAMEMNON
Reflect who it is to whom thou dost this grace.

ODYSSEUS
This man was once my foe, yet was he noble.

AGAMEMNON
Can it be thou wilt reverence a dead foe?

ODYSSEUS
His worth with me far outweighs enmity.

AGAMEMNON
Unstable of impulse are such men as thou.

ODYSSEUS
Many are friends now and hereafter foes.

AGAMEMNON
Do you then praise such friends as worth the winning?

ODYSSEUS
I am not wont to praise a stubborn soul.

AGAMEMNON
Cowards you would have us show ourselves this day.

ODYSSEUS
Not so, but just men before all the Greeks.

AGAMEMNON
You bid me then permit these funeral rites?

ODYSSEUS
Even so: for I myself shall come to this.

AGAMEMNON
Alike in all things each works for himself.

ODYSSEUS
And for whom should I work, if not myself?

AGAMEMNON
Let it be known then as your doing, not mine.

ODYSSEUS
So be it. At least you will have acted nobly.

AGAMEMNON
Nay, but of this be certain, that to thee
Willingly would I grant a greater boon.
Yet he, in that world as in this, shall be
Most hateful to me. But act as you deem fit.
(AGAMEMNON *and his retinue go out.*)

LEADER
After such proof, Odysseus, a fool only
Could say that inborn wisdom was not thine.

ODYSSEUS
Let Teucer know that I shall be henceforth
His friend, no less than I was once his foe.
And I will join in burying this dead man,
And share in all due rites, omitting none
Which mortal men to noblest heroes owe.

TEUCER
Noble Odysseus, for thy words I praise thee
Without stint. Wholly hast thou belied my fears.
Thou, his worst foe among the Greeks, hast yet
Alone stood by him staunchly, nor thought fit
To glory and exult over the dead,
Like that chief crazed with arrogance, who came,
He and his brother, hoping to cast forth
The dead man shamefully without burial.
May therefore the supreme Olympian Father,
The remembering Fury and fulfilling Justice
Destroy these vile men vilely, even as they
Sought to cast forth this hero unjustly outraged.
But pardon me, thou son of old Laertes,
That I must scruple to allow thine aid

In these rites, lest I so displease the dead.
In all else share our toil; and wouldst thou bring
Any man from the host, we grudge thee not.
What else remains, I will provide. And know
That thou towards us hast acted generously.

ODYSSEUS

It was my wish. But if my help herein
Pleases you not, so be it, I depart.

(ODYSSEUS *goes out.*)

TEUCER

'Tis enough. Too long is the time we have wasted
In talk. Haste some with spades to the grave:
Speedily hollow it. Some set the cauldron
On high amid wreathing flames ready filled
For pious ablution.
Then a third band go, fetch forth from the tent
All the armour he once wore under his shield.
Thou too, child, lovingly lay thy hand
On thy father's corpse, and with all thy strength
Help me to lift him: for the dark blood-tide
Still upward is streaming warm through the arteries.
All then who openly now would appear
Friends to the dead, come, hasten forwards.
To our valiant lord this labour is due.
We have served none nobler among men.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Unto him who has seen may manifold knowledge
Come; but before he sees, no man
May divine what destiny awaits him.

For a general treatment of the various critical problems of the play, the readers may be referred to the introduction in R. C. Jebb's edition.

R. C. Trevelyan, in the original printing of his translation, points out that in his version he has so rendered all the choral passages that they can be used with music written for the original Greek text. It might also be noted that Trevelyan's form of the name *Aias* has in the present version been changed to Ajax throughout.

1. Ajax is alluding to the fact that his cry of lamentation, *aiai,* closely accords with the letters of his name, *Aias,* as it is spelled in the Greek.

2. These lines refer to the former war at Troy in which Heracles and Telamon, the father of Ajax, participated.

3. The incident is recorded in Book VII of the *Iliad,* lines 303 ff. where Hector exchanged his sword for Ajax's belt, "bright with purple."

4. Aerope, wife of Atreus and mother of Agamemnon, was the daughter of Catreus, King of Crete, according to the version of the legend which Sophocles is following here.

II
OEDIPUS THE KING

Characters in the Play

Oedipus, *King of Thebes*
Priest of Zeus
Creon, *brother of* Jocasta
Teiresias, *the blind prophet*
Jocasta
First Messenger, *a shepherd from Corinth*
A Shepherd, *formerly in the service of* Laius
Second Messenger, *from the house*
Chorus of Theban Elders

Mute Persons

A train of Suppliants (*old men, youths, and children*).
The children Antigone *and* Ismene, *daughters of*
Oedipus *and* Jocasta

INTRODUCTION

OEDIPUS THE KING, Sophocles' masterpiece, is based upon the same Theban saga which Aeschylus used in his *The Seven Against Thebes*. Its date is unknown, though in all probability it must have been written when the poet's powers were at their zenith. The events of the story antecedent to the opening of the play emerge as its action advances. We hear of the oracle which warned Laius, the father of Oedipus, that a son would be born to him who would slay him. We hear how the son was born, was exposed, but rescued and reared by Polybus and Merope, King and Queen of Corinth, whom the boy regarded as his parents. We learn that Oedipus, in ignorance, slew Laius, came to Thebes, solved the riddle of the Sphinx, was made king, and married the recently widowed queen, Jocasta, who actually was his own mother. Many years have passed since their marriage, and two sons and two daughters were born to them. But presently a great calamity fell upon Thebes, a plague which was virtually destroying the city. Sophocles begins his tragedy at this point in the story, as a group of subjects appeal to their great king, Oedipus, to help them in their desolation. The action of the play reveals how Oedipus gradually came to learn the horrible truth that he had actually killed his father and married his mother.

Purely from the structural or technical point of view, Sophocles' play is practically unrivalled in dramatic literature. With remarkable skill he allows Oedipus step by step to become acquainted with the facts of his past, at the same time exploiting to the full the possibilities for dramatic irony, since the audience always knows more of the truth than Oedipus at any given moment in the play. Furthermore, rarely does one find such perfect motivation for individual actions within the drama. Each move by each character emerges convincingly from what has happened immediately before. Such improbabilities as there may be fall outside the limits of the play itself, as Aristotle noted in his *Poetics*. Because *Oedipus the King* possessed so many formal and technical excellences, it is not strange that Aristotle used it more frequently than any other Greek tragedy to illustrate his various critical theories.

The principal characters are masterfully drawn. First there is Creon,

here certainly not the person he is in the *Antigone,* who serves as a balance, a kind of mean, to which in a sense the aberrations of Oedipus from the norm are referred. His reaction to Oedipus' hasty and ill-judged accusations early in the play is reserved, restrained and honest. In fact, one of the most notable passages in the tragedy is Creon's speech in which he states the reasons why he would never wish to become king. At the close of the play Creon deals kindly but firmly with the broken king, and his personality, more than anything else, mitigates the horror of the tragic conclusion.

Jocasta is presented as the loyal and loving wife of Oedipus, and yet Sophocles has been able to infuse into her attitude towards Oedipus just enough of a maternal element to make her a dramatically telling figure. It is she who stops the quarrel between Oedipus and Creon. It is she who endeavours to curb Oedipus' inherent hot temper. It is she who clings tenaciously to her belief that the words of oracles and seers are worthless. Relying on this belief, she tries to comfort Oedipus and convince him that the gods wisely govern human destiny and that no human power can reveal the gods' will to men. In her own right Jocasta is a tragic figure of no inconsiderable proportions.

The character of Oedipus naturally dominates the whole play. From it primarily Aristotle has derived his famous definition of the tragic hero (*Poetics,* XIII), "a man who is highly renowned and prosperous, but one who is not preëminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment or frailty." Much has been written on Oedipus' rashness and his temper. Critics have pointed to his erratic perceptions which are now keen, and now amazingly faulty, and to his intense power of concentration which enables him to see only one thing at a time, very often to his terrible detriment.[1] All these qualities and more which are readily discernible in the Sophoclean portrait make his Oedipus one of the great characterizations which have come out of antiquity.

Oedipus the King has sometimes been called a tragedy of Fate, in which the characters are caught in a web of circumstance, from which they feebly and vainly try to extricate themselves. This may be partially true, but certainly there is a greater significance to the play than this theory would lead us to suspect. Oedipus in some sense is presented as master of his own destiny, or else it is meaningless that at the end of the play he does not excuse himself by pleading that he did not know what he was doing, but rather accepts full responsibility as a moral agent for all his acts, whether done in ignorance or not. In this point seems to lie the high distinction of the play, and its universal appeal. Tragic poets before

[1] Cf. M. L. Barstow, *"Oedipus Rex:* A Typical Greek Tragedy," in *The Greek Genius and its Influence,* edited by Lane Cooper.

Sophocles had studied the phenomenon of evil-doing perpetuating itself, and had insisted that men were accountable for their deeds, but somehow in this play the poet seems to have seen more deeply into the essential nature of human experience, and has communicated his vision in a masterpiece of dramatic art.

OEDIPUS THE KING

(SCENE:—*Before the royal palace of Oedipus at Thebes. In front of the large central doors there is an altar; a smaller altar stands also near each of the two side-doors. Suppliants—old men, youths, and young children —are seated on the steps of the altars. They are dressed in white tunics and cloaks,—their hair bound with white fillets. On the altars they have laid down olive-branches wreathed with fillets of wool. The* PRIEST OF ZEUS, *a venerable man, is alone standing, facing the central doors of the palace. These are now thrown open. Followed by two attendants, who place themselves on either side of the doors,* OEDIPUS *enters, in the robes of a king. For a moment he gazes silently on the groups at the altars, and then speaks.*)

OEDIPUS

MY CHILDREN, latest-born to Cadmus who was of old, why are ye set before me thus with wreathed branches of suppliants, while the city reeks with incense, rings with prayers for health and cries of woe? I deemed it unmeet, my children, to hear these things at the mouth of others, and have come hither myself, I, Oedipus renowned of all.

Tell me, then, thou venerable man—since it is thy natural part to speak for these—in what mood are ye placed here, with what dread or what desire? Be sure that I would gladly give all aid; hard of heart were I, did I not pity such suppliants as these.

PRIEST OF ZEUS

Nay, Oedipus, ruler of my land, thou seest of what years we are who beset thy altars,—some, nestlings still too tender for far flights,—some, bowed with age, priests, as I of Zeus,—and these, the chosen youth; while the rest of the folk sit with wreathed branches in the market-places, and before the two shrines of Pallas, and where Ismenus gives answer by fire.

For the city, as thou thyself seest, is now too sorely vexed, and can no more lift her head from beneath the angry waves of death; a blight is on her in the fruitful blossoms of the land, in the herds among the pastures, in the barren pangs of women; and withal the flaming god, the malign

plague, hath swooped on us, and ravages the town; by whom the house of Cadmus is made waste, but dark Hades rich in groans and tears.

It is not as deeming thee ranked with gods that I and these children are suppliants at thy hearth, but as deeming thee first of men, both in life's common chances, and when mortals have to do with more than man: seeing that thou camest to the town of Cadmus, and didst quit us of the tax that we rendered to the hard songstress; and this, though thou knewest nothing from us that could avail thee, nor hadst been schooled; no, by a god's aid, 'tis said and believed, didst thou uplift our life.

And now, Oedipus, king glorious in all eyes, we beseech thee, all we suppliants, to find for us some succour, whether by the whisper of a god thou knowest it, or haply as in the power of man; for I see that, when men have been proved in deeds past, the issues of their counsels, too, most often have effect.

On, best of mortals, again uplift our State! On, guard thy fame,—since now this land calls thee saviour for thy former zeal; and never be it our memory of thy reign that we were first restored and afterward cast down: nay, lift up this State in such wise that it fall no more!

With good omen didst thou give us that past happiness; now also show thyself the same. For if thou art to rule this land, even as thou art now its lord, 'tis better to be lord of men than of a waste: since neither walled town nor ship is anything, if it is void and no men dwell with thee therein.

OEDIPUS

Oh my piteous children, known, well known to me are the desires wherewith ye have come: well wot I that ye suffer all; yet, sufferers as ye are, there is not one of you whose suffering is as mine. Your pain comes on each one of you for himself alone, and for no other; but my soul mourns at once for the city, and for myself, and for thee.

So that ye rouse me not, truly, as one sunk in sleep: no, be sure that I have wept full many tears, gone many ways in wanderings of thought. And the sole remedy which, well pondering, I could find, this I have put into act. I have sent the son of Menoeceus, Creon, mine own wife's brother, to the Pythian house of Phoebus, to learn by what deed or word I might deliver this town. And already, when the lapse of days is reckoned, it troubles me what he doth; for he tarries strangely, beyond the fitting space. But when he comes, then shall I be no true man if I do not all that the god shows.

PRIEST

Nay, in season hast thou spoken; at this moment these sign to me that Creon draws near.

OEDIPUS

O king Apollo, may he come to us in the brightness of saving fortune, even as his face is bright!

PRIEST

Nay, to all seeming, he brings comfort; else would he not be coming crowned thus thickly with berry-laden bay.

OEDIPUS

We shall know soon: he is at range to hear.—(*Enter* CREON) Prince, my kinsman, son of Menoeceus, what news hast thou brought us from the god?

CREON

Good news: I tell thee that even troubles hard to bear,—if haply they find the right issue,—will end in perfect peace.

OEDIPUS

But what is the oracle? So far, thy words make me neither bold nor yet afraid.

CREON

If thou wouldest hear while these are nigh, I am ready to speak; or else to go within.

OEDIPUS

Speak before all: the sorrow which I bear is for these more than for mine own life.

CREON

With thy leave, I will tell what I heard from the god. Phoebus our lord bids us plainly to drive out a defiling thing, which (he saith) hath been harboured in this land, and not to harbour it, so that it cannot be healed.

OEDIPUS

By what rite shall we cleanse us? What is the manner of the misfortune?

CREON

By banishing a man, or by bloodshed in quittance of bloodshed, since it is that blood which brings the tempest on our city.

OEDIPUS

And who is the man whose fate he thus reveals?

CREON

Laius, king, was lord of our land before thou wast pilot of this State.

OEDIPUS

I know it well—by hearsay, for I saw him never.

CREON

He was slain; and the god now bids us plainly to wreak vengeance on his murderers—whosoever they be.

OEDIPUS

And where are they upon the earth? Where shall the dim track of this old crime be found?

CREON

In this land,—said the god. What is sought for can be caught; only that which is not watched escapes.

OEDIPUS

And was it in the house, or in the field, or on strange soil that Laius met this bloody end?

CREON

'Twas on a visit to Delphi, as he said, that he had left our land; and he came home no more, after he had once set forth.

OEDIPUS

And was there none to tell? Was there no comrade of his journey who saw the deed, from whom tidings might have been gained, and used?

CREON

All perished, save one who fled in fear, and could tell for certain but one thing of all that he saw.

OEDIPUS

And what was that? One thing might show the clue to many, could we get but a small beginning for hope.

CREON

He said that robbers met and fell on them, not in one man's might, but with full many hands.

OEDIPUS

How, then, unless there was some trafficking in bribes from here, should the robber have dared thus far?

CREON

Such things were surmised; but, Laius once slain, amid our troubles no avenger arose.

OEDIPUS

But, when royalty had fallen thus, what trouble in your path can have hindered a full search?

CREON

The riddling Sphinx had made us let dark things go, and was inviting us to think of what lay at our doors.

OEDIPUS

Nay, I will start afresh, and once more make dark things plain. Right worthily hath Phoebus, and worthily hast thou, bestowed this care on the cause of the dead; and so, as is meet, ye shall find me too leagued with you in seeking vengeance for this land, and for the god besides. On behalf of no far-off friend, no, but in mine own cause, shall I dispel this taint. For whoever was the slayer of Laius might wish to take vengeance on me also with a hand as fierce. Therefore, in doing right to Laius, I serve myself.

Come, haste ye, my children, rise from the altar-steps, and lift these suppliant boughs; and let some other summon hither the folk of Cadmus, warned that I mean to leave nought untried; for our health (with the god's help) shall be made certain—or our ruin.

PRIEST

My children, let us rise; we came at first to seek what this man promises of himself. And may Phoebus, who sent these oracles, come to us therewith, our saviour and deliverer from the pest.

(*Exeunt* OEDIPUS *and* PRIEST. *Enter* CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS.)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O sweetly-speaking message of Zeus, in what spirit hast thou come from golden Pytho unto glorious Thebes? I am on the rack, terror shakes my soul, O thou Delian healer to whom wild cries rise, in holy fear of thee, what thing thou wilt work for me, perchance unknown before, perchance renewed with the revolving years: tell me, thou immortal Voice, born of Golden Hope!

antistrophe 1

First call I on thee, daughter of Zeus, divine Athena, and on thy sister, guardian of our land, Artemis, who sits on her throne of fame, above the circle of our Agora, and on Phoebus the far-darter: O shine forth on me, my three-fold help against death! If ever aforetime, in arrest of ruin hurrying on the city, ye drove a fiery pest beyond our borders, come now also!

strophe 2

Woe is me, countless are the sorrows that I bear; a plague is on all our host, and thought can find no weapon for defence. The fruits of the glorious earth grow not; by no birth of children do women surmount the pangs in which they shriek; and life on life mayest thou see sped, like bird on nimble wing, aye, swifter than resistless fire, to the shore of the western god.

antistrophe 2

By such deaths, past numbering, the city perishes: unpitied, her children lie on the ground, spreading pestilence, with none to mourn: and meanwhile young wives, and grey-haired mothers with them, uplift a wail at the steps of the altars, some here, some there, entreating for their weary woes. The prayer to the Healer rings clear, and, blent therewith, the voice of lamentation: for these things, golden daughter of Zeus, send us the bright face of comfort.

strophe 3

And grant that the fierce god of death, who now with no brazen shields, yet amid cries as of battle, wraps me in the flame of his onset, may turn his back in speedy flight from our land, borne by a fair wind to the great deep of Amphitrite, or to those waters in which none find haven, even to the Thracian wave; for if night leave aught undone, day follows to accomplish this. O thou who wieldest the powers of the fire-fraught lightning, O Zeus our father, slay him beneath thy thunderbolt!

antistrophe 3

Lycean King, fain were I that thy shafts also, from thy bent bow's string of woven gold, should go abroad in their might, our champions in the face of the foe; yea, and the flashing fires of Artemis wherewith she glances through the Lycian hills. And I call him whose locks are bound with gold, who is named with the name of this land, ruddy Bacchus to whom Bacchants cry, the comrade of the Maenads, to draw near with the blaze of his blithe torch, our ally against the god unhonoured among gods.

(Oedipus *enters during the closing strains of the choral song.*)

Oedipus

Thou prayest: and in answer to thy prayer,—if thou wilt give a loyal welcome to my words and minister to thine own disease,—thou mayest hope to find succour and relief from woes. These words will I speak publicly, as one who has been a stranger to this report, a stranger to the

deed; for I should not be far on the track, if I were tracing it alone, without a clue. But as it is,—since it was only after the time of the deed that I was numbered a Theban among Thebans,—to you, the Cadmeans all, I do thus proclaim.

Whosoever of you knows by whom Laius son of Labdacus was slain, I bid him to declare all to me. And if he is afraid, I tell him to remove the danger of the charge from his path by denouncing himself; for he shall suffer nothing else unlovely, but only leave the land, unhurt. Or if any one knows an alien, from another land, as the assassin, let him not keep silence; for I will pay his guerdon, and my thanks shall rest with him besides.

But if ye keep silence—if any one, through fear, shall seek to screen friend or self from my behest—hear ye what I then shall do. I charge you that no one of this land, whereof I hold the empire and the throne, give shelter or speak word unto that murderer, whosoever he be,—make him partner of his prayer or sacrifice, or serve him with the lustral rite; but that all ban him their homes, knowing that *this* is our defiling thing, as the oracle of the Pythian god hath newly shown me. I then am on this wise the ally of the god and of the slain. And I pray solemnly that the slayer, whoso he be, whether his hidden guilt is lonely or hath partners, evilly, as he is evil, may wear out his unblest life. And for myself I pray that if, with my privity, he should become an inmate of my house, I may suffer the same things which even now I called down upon others. And on you I lay it to make all these words good, for my sake, and for the sake of the god, and for our land's, thus blasted with barrenness by angry heaven.

For even if the matter had not been urged on us by a god, it was not meet that ye should leave the guilt thus unpurged, when one so noble, and he your king, had perished; rather were ye bound to search it out. And now, since 'tis I who hold the powers which once he held, who possess his bed and the wife who bare seed to him; and since, had his hope of issue not been frustrate, children born of one mother would have made ties betwixt him and me—but, as it was, fate swooped upon his head; by reason of these things will I uphold this cause, even as the cause of mine own sire, and will leave nought untried in seeking to find him whose hand shed that blood, for the honour of the son of Labdacus and of Polydorus and elder Cadmus and Agenor who was of old.

And for those who obey me not, I pray that the gods send them neither harvest of the earth nor fruit of the womb, but that they be wasted by their lot that now is, or by one yet more dire. But for all you, the loyal folk of Cadmus to whom these things seem good, may Justice, our ally, and all the gods be with you graciously for ever.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

As thou hast put me on my oath, on my oath, O king, I will speak. I am not the slayer, nor can I point to him who slew. As for the question, it was for Phoebus, who sent it, to tell us this thing—who can have wrought the deed.

OEDIPUS

Justly said; but no man on the earth can force the gods to what they will not.

LEADER

I would fain say what seems to me next best after this.

OEDIPUS

If there is yet a third course, spare not to show it.

LEADER

I know that our lord Teiresias is the seer most like to our lord Phoebus; from whom, O king, a searcher of these things might learn them most clearly.

OEDIPUS

Not even this have I left out of my cares. On the hint of Creon, I have twice sent a man to bring him; and this long while I marvel why he is not here.

LEADER

Indeed (his skill apart) the rumours are but faint and old.

OEDIPUS

What rumours are they? I look to every story.

LEADER

Certain wayfarers were said to have killed him.

OEDIPUS

I, too, have heard it, but none sees him who saw it.

LEADER

Nay, if he knows what fear is, he will not stay when he hears thy curses, so dire as they are.

OEDIPUS

When a man shrinks not from a deed, neither is he scared by a word.

LEADER

But there is one to convict him. For here they bring at last the godlike prophet, in whom alone of men doth live the truth.

(*Enter* TEIRESIAS, *led by a boy.*)

OEDIPUS

Teiresias, whose soul grasps all things, the lore that may be told and the unspeakable, the secrets of heaven and the low things of earth,—thou feelest, though thou canst not see, what a plague doth haunt our State,—from which, great prophet, we find in thee our protector and only saviour. Now, Phoebus—if indeed thou knowest it not from the messengers—sent answer to our question that the only riddance from this pest which could come was if we should learn aright the slayers of Laius, and slay them, or send them into exile from our land. Do thou, then, grudge neither voice of birds nor any other way of seer-lore that thou hast, but rescue thyself and the State, rescue me, rescue all that is defiled by the dead. For we are in thy hand; and man's noblest task is to help others by his best means and powers.

TEIRESIAS

Alas, how dreadful to have wisdom where it profits not the wise! Aye, I knew this well, but let it slip out of mind; else would I never have come here.

OEDIPUS

What now? How sad thou hast come in!

TEIRESIAS

Let me go home; most easily wilt thou bear thine own burden to the end, and I mine, if thou wilt consent.

OEDIPUS

Thy words are strange, nor kindly to this State which nurtured thee, when thou withholdest this response.

TEIRESIAS

Nay, I see that thou, on thy part, openest not thy lips in season: therefore I speak not, that neither may I have thy mishap.

OEDIPUS

For the love of the gods, turn not away, if thou hast knowledge: all we suppliants implore thee on our knees.

TEIRESIAS

Aye, for ye are all without knowledge; but never will I reveal my griefs—that I say not thine.

OEDIPUS

How sayest thou? Thou knowest the secret, and wilt not tell it, but art minded to betray us and to destroy the State?

TEIRESIAS

I will pain neither myself nor thee. Why vainly ask these things? Thou wilt not learn them from me.

OEDIPUS

What, basest of the base,—for thou wouldest anger a very stone,—wilt thou never speak out? Can nothing touch thee? Wilt thou never make an end?

TEIRESIAS

Thou blamest my temper, but seest not that to which thou thyself art wedded: no, thou findest fault with me.

OEDIPUS

And who would not be angry to hear the words with which thou now dost slight this city?

TEIRESIAS

The future will come of itself, though I shroud it in silence.

OEDIPUS

Then, seeing that it must come, thou on thy part shouldst tell me thereof.

TEIRESIAS

I will speak no further; rage, then, if thou wilt, with the fiercest wrath thy heart doth know.

OEDIPUS

Aye, verily, I will not spare—so wroth I am—to speak all my thought. Know that thou seemest to me e'en to have helped in plotting the deed, and to have done it, short of slaying with thy hands. Hadst thou eyesight, I would have said that the doing, also, of this thing was thine alone.

TEIRESIAS

In sooth?—I charge thee that thou abide by the decree of thine own mouth, and from this day speak neither to these nor to me: *thou* art the accursed defiler of this land.

OEDIPUS

So brazen with thy blustering taunt? And wherein dost thou trust to escape thy due?

TEIRESIAS

I have escaped: in my truth is my strength.

OEDIPUS

Who taught thee this? It was not, at least, thine art.

TEIRESIAS

Thou: for thou didst spur me into speech against my will.

OEDIPUS

What speech? Speak again that I may learn it better.

TEIRESIAS

Didst thou not take my sense before? Or art thou tempting me in talk?

OEDIPUS

No, I took it not so that I can call it known:—speak again.

TEIRESIAS

I say that thou art the slayer of the man whose slayer thou seekest.

OEDIPUS

Now thou shalt rue that thou hast twice said words so dire.

TEIRESIAS

Wouldst thou have me say more, that thou mayest be more wroth?

OEDIPUS

What thou wilt; it will be said in vain.

TEIRESIAS

I say that thou hast been living in unguessed shame with thy nearest kin, and seest not to what woe thou hast come.

OEDIPUS

Dost thou indeed think that thou shalt always speak thus without smarting?

TEIRESIAS

Yes, if there is any strength in truth.

OEDIPUS

Nay, there is,—for all save thee; for thee that strength is not, since thou art maimed in ear, and in wit, and in eye.

TEIRESIAS

Aye, and thou art a poor wretch to utter taunts which every man here will soon hurl at thee.

OEDIPUS

Night, endless night hath thee in her keeping, so that thou canst never hurt me, or any man who sees the sun.

TEIRESIAS

No, thy doom is not to fall by *me:* Apollo is enough, whose care it is to work that out.

OEDIPUS

Are these Creon's devices, or thine?

TEIRESIAS

Nay, Creon is no plague to thee; thou art thine own.

OEDIPUS

O wealth, and empire, and skill surpassing skill in life's keen rivalries, how great is the envy that cleaves to you, if for the sake, yea, of this power which the city hath put into my hands, a gift unsought, Creon the trusty, Creon mine old friend, hath crept on me by stealth, yearning to thrust me out of it, and hath suborned such a scheming juggler as this, a tricky quack, who hath eyes only for his gains, but in his art is blind!

Come, now, tell me, where hast thou proved thyself a seer? Why, when the Watcher was here who wove dark song, didst thou say nothing that could free this folk? Yet the riddle, at least, was not for the first comer to read; there was need of a seer's skill; and none such thou wast found to have, either by help of birds, or as known from any god: no, I came, I, Oedipus the ignorant, and made her mute, when I had seized the answer by my wit, untaught of birds. And it is I whom thou art trying to oust, thinking to stand close to Creon's throne. Methinks thou and the plotter of these things will rue your zeal to purge the land. Nay, didst thou not seem to be an old man, thou shouldst have learned to thy cost how bold thou art.

LEADER

To our thinking, both this man's words and thine, Oedipus, have been said in anger. Not for such words is our need, but to seek how we shall best discharge the mandates of the god.

TEIRESIAS

King though thou art, the right of reply, at least, must be deemed the same for both; of that I too am lord. Not to thee do I live servant, but to Loxias; and so I shall not stand enrolled under Creon for my patron. And I tell thee—since thou hast taunted me even with blindness—that thou hast sight, yet seest not in what misery thou art, nor where thou dwellest, nor with whom. Dost thou know of what stock thou art? And thou hast

been an unwitting foe to thine own kin, in the shades, and on the earth above; and the double lash of thy mother's and thy father's curse shall one day drive thee from this land in dreadful haste, with darkness then on the eyes that now see true.

And what place shall not be harbour to thy shriek, what of all Cithaeron shall not ring with it soon, when thou hast learnt the meaning of the nuptials in which, within that house, thou didst find a fatal haven, after a voyage so fair? And a throng of other ills thou guessest not, which shall make thee level with thy true self and with thine own brood.

Therefore heap thy scorns on Creon and on my message: for no one among men shall ever be crushed more miserably than thou.

OEDIPUS

Are these taunts to be indeed borne from *him?*—Hence, ruin take thee! Hence, this instant! Back!—away!—avaunt thee from these doors!

TEIRESIAS

I had never come, not I, hadst thou not called me.

OEDIPUS

I knew not that thou wast about to speak folly, or it had been long ere I had sent for thee to my house.

TEIRESIAS

Such am I,—as thou thinkest, a fool; but for the parents who begat thee, sane.

OEDIPUS

What parents? Stay . . . and who of men is my sire?

TEIRESIAS

This day shall show thy birth and shall bring thy ruin.

OEDIPUS

What riddles, what dark words thou always speakest!

TEIRESIAS

Nay, art not thou most skilled to unravel dark speech?

OEDIPUS

Make that my reproach in which thou shalt find me great.

TEIRESIAS

Yet 'twas just that fortune that undid thee.

OEDIPUS

Nay, if I delivered this town, I care not.

TEIRESIAS

Then I will go: so do thou, boy, take me hence.

OEDIPUS

Aye, let him take thee: while here, thou art a hindrance, thou, a trouble: when thou hast vanished, thou wilt not vex me more.

TEIRESIAS

I will go when I have done mine errand, fearless of thy frown: for thou canst never destroy me. And I tell thee—the man of whom thou hast this long while been in quest, uttering threats, and proclaiming a search into the murder of Laius—that man is here,—in seeming, an alien sojourner, but anon he shall be found a native Theban, and shall not be glad of his fortune. A blind man, he who now hath sight, a beggar, who now is rich, he shall make his way to a strange land, feeling the ground before him with his staff. And he shall be found at once brother and father of the children with whom he consorts; son and husband of the woman who bore him; heir to his father's bed, shedder of his father's blood.

So go thou in and think on that; and if thou find that I have been at fault, say thenceforth that I have no wit in prophecy.

(TEIRESIAS *is led out by the boy.* OEDIPUS *enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Who is he of whom the divine voice from the Delphian rock hath spoken, as having wrought with red hands horrors that no tongue can tell?

It is time that he ply in flight a foot stronger than the feet of storm-swift steeds: for the son of Zeus is springing on him, all armed with fiery lightnings, and with him come the dread, unerring Fates.

antistrophe 1

Yea, newly given from snowy Parnassus, the message hath flashed forth to make all search for the unknown man. Into the wild wood's covert, among caves and rocks he is roaming, fierce as a bull, wretched and forlorn on his joyless path, still seeking to put from him the doom spoken at Earth's central shrine: but that doom ever lives, ever flits around him.

strophe 2

Dreadly, in sooth, dreadly doth the wise augur move me, who approve not, nor am able to deny. How to speak, I know not; I am fluttered with forebodings; neither in the present have I clear vision,

nor of the future. Never in past days, nor in these, have I heard how the house of Labdacus or the son of Polybus had, either against other, any grief that I could bring as proof in assailing the public fame of Oedipus, and seeking to avenge the line of Labdacus for the undiscovered murder.

antistrophe 2

Nay, Zeus indeed and Apollo are keen of thought, and know the things of earth; but that mortal seer wins knowledge above mine, of this there can be no sure test; though man may surpass man in lore. Yet, until I see the word made good, never will I assent when men blame Oedipus. Before all eyes, the winged maiden came against him of old, and he was seen to be wise; he bore the test, in welcome service to our State; never, therefore, by the verdict of my heart shall he be adjudged guilty of crime.

(*Enter* CREON)

CREON

Fellow-citizens, having learned that Oedipus the king lays dire charges against me, I am here, indignant. If, in the present troubles, he thinks that he has suffered from *me*, by word or deed, aught that tends to harm, in truth I crave not my full term of years, when I must bear such blame as this. The wrong of this rumour touches me not in one point alone, but has the largest scope, if I am to be called a traitor in the city, a traitor too by thee and by my friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, but this taunt came under stress, perchance, of anger, rather than from the purpose of the heart.

CREON

And the saying was uttered, that *my* counsels won the seer to utter his falsehoods?

LEADER

Such things were said—I know not with what meaning.

CREON

And was this charge laid against me with steady eyes and steady mind?

LEADER

I know not; I see not what my masters do: but here comes our lord forth from the house.

(*Enter* OEDIPUS)

OEDIPUS

Sirrah, how camest thou here? Hast thou a front so bold that thou hast come to my house, who art the proved assassin of its master,—the palpable robber of my crown? Come, tell me, in the name of the gods, was it cowardice or folly that thou sawest in me, that thou didst plot to do this thing? Didst thou think that I would not note this deed of thine creeping on me by stealth, or, aware, would not ward it off? Now is not thine attempt foolish,—to seek, without followers or friends, a throne,—a prize which followers and wealth must win?

CREON

Mark me now,—in answer to thy words, hear a fair reply, and then judge for thyself on knowledge.

OEDIPUS

Thou art apt in speech, but I have a poor wit for thy lessons, since I have found thee my malignant foe.

CREON

Now first hear how I will explain this very thing—

OEDIPUS

Explain me not one thing—that thou art not false.

CREON

If thou deemest that stubbornness without sense is a good gift, thou art not wise.

OEDIPUS

If thou deemest that thou canst wrong a kinsman and escape the penalty, thou art not sane.

CREON

Justly said, I grant thee: but tell me what is the wrong that thou sayest thou hast suffered from me.

OEDIPUS

Didst thou advise, or didst thou not, that I should send for that reverend seer?

CREON

And now I am still of the same mind.

OEDIPUS

How long is it, then, since Laius—

CREON

Since Laius . . . ? I take not thy drift . . .

OEDIPUS

—was swept from men's sight by a deadly violence?

CREON

The count of years would run far into the past.

OEDIPUS

Was this seer, then, of the craft in those days?

CREON

Yea, skilled as now, and in equal honour.

OEDIPUS

Made he, then, any mention of me at that time?

CREON

Never, certainly, when I was within hearing.

OEDIPUS

But held ye not a search touching the murder?

CREON

Due search we held, of course—and learned nothing.

OEDIPUS

And how was it that this sage did not tell his story *then?*

CREON

I know not; where I lack light, 'tis my wont to be silent.

OEDIPUS

Thus much, at least, thou knowest, and couldst declare with light enough.

CREON

What is that? If I know it, I will not deny.

OEDIPUS

That, if he had not conferred with thee, he would never have named *my* slaying of Laius.

CREON

If so he speaks, thou best knowest; but I claim to learn from thee as much as thou hast now from me.

OEDIPUS

Learn thy fill: I shall never be found guilty of the blood.

CREON

Say, then—thou hast married my sister?

OEDIPUS

The question allows not of denial.

CREON

And thou rulest the land as she doth, with like sway?

OEDIPUS

She obtains from me all her desire.

CREON

And rank not I as a third peer of you twain?

OEDIPUS

Aye, 'tis just therein that thou art seen a false friend.

CREON

Not so, if thou wouldst reason with thine own heart as I with mine. And first weigh this,—whether thou thinkest that any one would choose to rule amid terrors rather than in unruffled peace,—granting that he is to have the same powers. Now I, for one, have no yearning in my nature to be a king rather than to do kingly deeds, no, nor hath any man who knows how to keep a sober mind. For now I win all boons from thee without fear; but, were I ruler myself, I should be doing much e'en against mine own pleasure.

How, then, could royalty be sweeter for me to have than painless rule and influence? Not yet am I so misguided as to desire other honours than those which profit. Now, all wish me joy; now, every man has a greeting for me; now, those who have a suit to thee crave speech with me, since therein is all their hope of success. Then why should I resign these things, and take those? No mind will become false, while it is wise. Nay, I am no lover of such policy, and, if another put it into deed, never could I bear to act with him.

And, in proof of this, first, go to Pytho, and ask if I brought thee true word of the oracle; then next, if thou find that I have planned aught in concert with the soothsayer, take and slay me, by the sentence not of one mouth, but of twain—by mine own, no less than thine. But make me not guilty in a corner, on unproved surmise. It is not right to adjudge bad men good at random, or good men bad. I count it a like thing for a man to cast off a true friend as to cast away the life in his own bosom, which

most he loves. Nay, thou wilt learn these things with sureness in time, for time alone shows a just man; but thou couldst discern a knave even in one day.

LEADER

Well hath he spoken, O king, for one who giveth heed not to fall: the quick in counsel are not sure.

OEDIPUS

When the stealthy plotter is moving on me in quick sort, I, too, must be quick with my counterplot. If I await him in repose, his ends will have been gained, and mine missed.

CREON

What wouldst thou, then? Cast me out of the land?

OEDIPUS

Not so: I desire thy death—not thy banishment—that thou mayest show forth what manner of thing is envy.

CREON

Thou speakest as resolved not to yield or to believe?

OEDIPUS

No; for thou persuadest me not that thou art worthy of belief.[1]

CREON

No, for I find thee not sane.

OEDIPUS

Sane, at least, in mine own interest.

CREON

Nay, thou shouldst be so in mine also.

OEDIPUS

Nay, thou art false.

CREON

But if thou understandest nought?

OEDIPUS

Yet must I rule.

CREON

Not if thou rule ill.

OEDIPUS

Hear him, O Thebes!

CREON

Thebes is for me also—not for thee alone.

(JOCASTA *enters from the palace.*)

LEADER

Cease, princes; and in good time for you I see Jocasta coming yonder from the house, with whose help ye should compose your present feud.

JOCASTA

Misguided men, why have ye raised such foolish strife of tongues? Are ye not ashamed, while the land is thus sick, to stir up troubles of your own? Come, go thou into the house,—and thou, Creon, to thy home,—and forbear to make much of a petty grief.

CREON

Kinswoman, Oedipus thy lord claims to do dread things unto me, even one or other of two ills,—to thrust me from the land of my fathers, or to slay me amain.

OEDIPUS

Yea; for I have caught him, lady, working evil, by ill arts, against my person.

CREON

Now may I see no good, but perish accursed, if I have done aught to thee of that wherewith thou chargest me!

JOCASTA

O, for the gods' love, believe it, Oedipus—first, for the awful sake of this oath unto the gods,—then for my sake and for theirs who stand before thee!

(*The following lines between the* CHORUS *and* OEDIPUS *and between the* CHORUS, JOCASTA, *and* OEDIPUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Consent, reflect, hearken, O my king, I pray thee!

OEDIPUS

What grace, then wouldest thou have me grant thee?

CHORUS

Respect him who aforetime was not foolish, and who now is strong in his oath.

OEDIPUS

Now dost thou know what thou cravest?

CHORUS

Yea.

OEDIPUS

Declare, then, what thou meanest.

CHORUS

That thou shouldest never use an unproved rumour to cast a dishonouring charge on the friend who has bound himself with a curse.

OEDIPUS

Then be very sure that, when thou seekest this, for me thou art seeking destruction, or exile from this land.

CHORUS

strophe 2

No, by him who stands in the front of all the heavenly host, no, by the Sun! Unblest, unfriended, may I die by the uttermost doom, if I have that thought! But my unhappy soul is worn by the withering of the land, and again by the thought that our old sorrows should be crowned by sorrows springing from you twain.

OEDIPUS

Then let him go, though I am surely doomed to death, or to be thrust dishonoured from the land. Thy lips, not his, move my compassion by their plaint; but he, where'er he be, shall be hated.

CREON

Sullen in yielding art thou seen, even as vehement in the excesses of thy wrath; but such natures are justly sorest for themselves to bear.

OEDIPUS

Then wilt thou not leave me in peace, and get thee gone?

CREON

I will go my way; I have found thee undiscerning, but in the sight of these I am just.

(*Exit* CREON.)

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Lady, why dost thou delay to take yon man into the house?

JOCASTA

I will do so, when I have learned what hath chanced.

CHORUS

Blind suspicion, bred of talk, arose; and, on the other part, injustice wounds.

JOCASTA

It was on both sides?

CHORUS

Aye.

JOCASTA

And what was the story?

CHORUS

Enough, methinks, enough—when our land is already vexed—that the matter should rest where it ceased.

OEDIPUS

Seest thou to what thou hast come, for all thy honest purpose, in seeking to slack and blunt my zeal?

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

King, I have said it not once alone—be sure that I should have been shown a madman, bankrupt in sane counsel, if I put thee away —thee, who gavest a true course to my beloved country when distraught by troubles—thee, who now also art like to prove our prospering guide.

JOCASTA

In the name of the gods, tell me also, O king, on what account thou hast conceived this steadfast wrath.

OEDIPUS

That will I; for I honour thee, lady, above yonder men:—the cause is Creon, and the plots that he hath laid against me.

JOCASTA

Speak on—if thou canst tell clearly how the feud began.

OEDIPUS

He says that I stand guilty of the blood of Laius.

JOCASTA

As on his own knowledge? Or on hearsay from another?

OEDIPUS

Nay, he hath made a rascal seer his mouthpiece; as for himself, he keeps his lips wholly pure.

JOCASTA

Then absolve thyself of the things whereof thou speakest; hearken to me, and learn for thy comfort that nought of mortal birth is a sharer in the science of the seer. I will give thee pithy proof of that.

An oracle came to Laius once—I will not say from Phoebus himself, but from his ministers—that the doom should overtake him to die by the hand of his child, who should spring from him and me.

Now Laius,—as, at least, the rumour saith,—was murdered one day by foreign robbers at a place where three highways meet. And the child's birth was not three days past, when Laius pinned its ankles together, and had it thrown, by others' hands, on a trackless mountain.

So, in that case, Apollo brought it not to pass that the babe should become the slayer of his sire, or that Laius should die—the dread thing which he feared—by his child's hand. Thus did the messages of seer-craft map out the future. Regard them, thou, not at all. Whatsoever needful things the god seeks, he himself will easily bring to light.

OEDIPUS

What restlessness of soul, lady, what tumult of the mind hath just come upon me since I heard thee speak!

JOCASTA

What anxiety hath startled thee, that thou sayest this?

OEDIPUS

Methought I heard this from thee,—that Laius was slain where three highways meet.

JOCASTA

Yea, that was the story; nor hath it ceased yet.

OEDIPUS

And where is the place where this befell?

JOCASTA

The land is called Phocis; and branching roads lead to the same spot from Delphi and from Daulia.

OEDIPUS

And what is the time that hath passed since these things were?

JOCASTA

The news was published to the town shortly before thou wast first seen in power over this land.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, what hast thou decreed to do unto me?

JOCASTA

And wherefore, Oedipus, doth this thing weigh upon thy soul?

OEDIPUS

Ask me not yet; but say what was the stature of Laius, and how ripe his manhood.

JOCASTA

He was tall,—the silver just lightly strewn among his hair; and his form was not greatly unlike to thine.

OEDIPUS

Unhappy that I am! Methinks I have been laying myself even now under a dread curse, and knew it not.

JOCASTA

How sayest thou? I tremble when I look on thee, my king.

OEDIPUS

Dread misgivings have I that the seer can see. But thou wilt show better if thou wilt tell me one thing more.

JOCASTA

Indeed—though I tremble—I will answer all thou askest, when I hear it.

OEDIPUS

Went he in small force, or with many armed followers, like a chieftain?

JOCASTA

Five they were in all,—a herald one of them; and there was one carriage, which bore Laius.

OEDIPUS

Alas! 'Tis now clear indeed.—Who was he who gave you these tidings, lady?

JOCASTA

A servant—the sole survivor who came home.

OEDIPUS

Is he haply at hand in the house now?

JOCASTA

No, truly; so soon as he came thence, and found thee reigning in the stead of Laius, he supplicated me, with hand laid on mine, that I would send him to the fields, to the pastures of the flocks, that he might be far from the sight of this town. And I sent him; he was worthy, for a slave, to win e'en a larger boon than that.

OEDIPUS

Would, then, that he could return to us without delay!

JOCASTA

It is easy: but wherefore dost thou enjoin this?

OEDIPUS

I fear, lady, that mine own lips have been unguarded; and therefore am I fain to behold him.

JOCASTA

Nay, he shall come. But I too, methinks, have a claim to learn what lies heavy on thy heart, my king.

OEDIPUS

Yea, and it shall not be kept from thee, now that my forebodings have advanced so far. Who, indeed, is more to me than thou, to whom I should speak in passing through such a fortune as this?

My father was Polybus of Corinth,—my mother, the Dorian Merope; and I was held the first of all the folk in that town, until a chance befell me, worthy, indeed, of wonder, though not worthy of mine own heat concerning it. At a banquet, a man full of wine cast it at me in his cups that I was not the true son of my sire. And I, vexed, restrained myself for that day as best I might; but on the next I went to my mother and father, and questioned them; and they were wroth for the taunt with him who had let that word fly. So on their part I had comfort; yet was this thing ever rankling in my heart; for it still crept abroad with strong rumour. And, unknown to mother or father, I went to Delphi; and Phoebus sent me forth disappointed of that knowledge for which I came, but in his response set forth other things, full of sorrow and terror and woe; even that I was fated to defile my mother's bed; and that I should show unto men a brood which they could not endure to behold; and that I should be the slayer of the sire who begat me.

And I, when I had listened to this, turned to flight from the land of Corinth, thenceforth wotting of its region by the stars alone, to some spot where I should never see fulfilment of the infamies foretold in mine evil doom. And on my way I came to the regions in which thou sayest that this prince perished. Now, lady, I will tell thee the truth. When in my journey I was near to those three roads, there met me a herald, and a man seated in a carriage drawn by colts, as thou hast described; and he who was in front, and the old man himself, were for thrusting me rudely from the path. Then, in anger, I struck him who pushed me aside—the driver; and the old man, seeing it, watched the moment when I was passing, and, from the carriage, brought his goad with two teeth down full upon my head. Yet was he paid with interest; by one swift blow from the staff in this hand he was rolled right out of the carriage, on his back; and I slew every man of them.

But if this stranger had any tie of kinship with Laius, who is now more wretched than the man before thee? What mortal could prove more hated of heaven? Whom no stranger, no citizen, is allowed to receive in his house; whom it is unlawful that any one accost; whom all must repel from their homes! And this—this curse—was laid on me by no mouth but mine own! And I pollute the bed of the slain man with the hands by which he perished. Say, am I vile? Oh, am I not utterly unclean?—seeing that I must be banished, and in banishment see not mine own people, nor set foot in mine own land, or else be joined in wedlock to my mother, and slay my sire, even Polybus, who begat and reared me.

Then would not he speak aright of Oedipus, who judged these things sent by some cruel power above man? Forbid, forbid, ye pure and awful gods, that I should see that day! No, may I be swept from among men, ere I behold myself visited with the brand of such a doom!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

To us, indeed, these things, O king, are fraught with fear; yet have hope, until at least thou hast gained full knowledge from him who saw the deed.

OEDIPUS

Hope, in truth, rests with me thus far alone; I can await the man summoned from the pastures.

JOCASTA

And when he has appeared—what wouldst thou have of him?

OEDIPUS

I will tell thee. If his story be found to tally with thine, I, at least, shall stand clear of disaster.

JOCASTA

And what of special note didst thou hear from me?

OEDIPUS

Thou wast saying that he spoke of Laius as slain by robbers. If, then, he still speaks, as before, of several, I was not the slayer: a solitary man could not be held the same with that band. But if he names one lonely wayfarer, then beyond doubt this guilt leans to me.

JOCASTA

Nay, be assured that thus, at least, the tale was first told; he cannot revoke that, for the city heard it, not I alone. But even if he should diverge somewhat from his former story, never, king, can he show that the murder of Laius, at least, is truly square to prophecy; of whom Loxias plainly said that he must die by the hand of my child. Howbeit that poor innocent never slew him, but perished first itself. So henceforth, for what touches divination, I would not look to my right hand or my left.

OEDIPUS

Thou judgest well. But nevertheless send some one to fetch the peasant, and neglect not this matter.

JOCASTA

I will send without delay. But let us come into the house: nothing will I do save at thy good pleasure.

(OEDIPUS *and* JOCASTA *go into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

May destiny still find me winning the praise of reverent purity in all words and deeds sanctioned by those laws of range sublime, called into life throughout the high clear heaven, whose father is Olympus alone; their parent was no race of mortal men, no, nor shall oblivion ever lay them to sleep; the god is mighty in them, and he grows not old.

antistrophe 1

Insolence breeds the tyrant; Insolence, once vainly surfeited on wealth that is not meet nor good for it, when it hath scaled the topmost ramparts, is hurled to a dire doom, wherein no service of the feet can serve. But I pray that the god never quell such rivalry as benefits the State; the god will I ever hold for our protector.

strophe 2

But if any man walks haughtily in deed or word, with no fear of Justice, no reverence for the images of gods, may an evil doom seize him for his ill-starred pride, if he will not win his vantage fairly, nor keep him from unholy deeds, but must lay profaning hands on sanctities.

Where such things are, what mortal shall boast any more than he can ward the arrows of the gods from his life? Nay, if such deeds are in honour, wherefore should we join in the sacred dance?

antistrophe 2

No more will I go reverently to earth's central and inviolate shrine, no more to Abae's temple or Olympia, if these oracles fit not the issue, so that all men shall point at them with the finger. Nay, king,—if thou art rightly called,—Zeus all-ruling, may it not escape thee and thine ever-deathless power!

The old prophecies concerning Laïus are fading; already men are setting them at nought, and nowhere is Apollo glorified with honours; the worship of the gods is perishing.

(JOCASTA *comes forth, bearing a branch, wreathed with festoons of wool, which, as a suppliant, she is about to lay on the altar of the household god, Lycean Apollo, in front of the palace.*)

JOCASTA

Princes of the land, the thought has come to me to visit the shrines of the gods, with this wreathed branch in my hands, and these gifts of incense. For Oedipus excites his soul overmuch with all manner of alarms, nor, like a man of sense, judges the new things by the old, but is at the will of the speaker, if he speak terrors.

Since, then, by counsel I can do no good, to thee, Lycean Apollo, for thou art nearest, I have come, a suppliant with these symbols of prayer, that thou mayest find us some riddance from uncleanness. For now we are all afraid, seeing *him* affrighted, even as they who see fear in the helmsman of their ship.

(*While* JOCASTA *is offering her prayers to the god, a* MESSENGER, *evidently a stranger, enters and addresses the Elders of the* CHORUS.)

MESSENGER

Might I learn from you, strangers, where is the house of the king Oedipus? Or, better still, tell me where he himself is—if ye know.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This is his dwelling, and he himself, stranger, is within; and this lady is the mother of his children.

MESSENGER

Then may she be ever happy in a happy home, since she is his heaven-blest queen.

JOCASTA

Happiness to thee also, stranger! 'tis the due of thy fair greeting.—But say what thou hast come to seek or to tell.

MESSENGER

Good tidings, lady, for thy house and for thy husband.

JOCASTA

What are they? And from whom hast thou come?

MESSENGER

From Corinth: and at the message which I will speak anon thou wilt rejoice—doubtless; yet haply grieve.

JOCASTA

And what is it? How hath it thus a double potency?

MESSENGER

The people will make him king of the Isthmian land, as 'twas said there.

JOCASTA

How then? Is the aged Polybus no more in power?

MESSENGER

No, verily: for death holds him in the tomb.

JOCASTA

How sayest thou? Is Polybus dead, old man?

MESSENGER

If I speak not the truth, I am content to die.

JOCASTA

O handmaid, away with all speed, and tell this to thy master! O ye oracles of the gods, where stand ye now! This is the man whom Oedipus long feared and shunned, lest he should slay him; and now this man hath died in the course of destiny, not by his hand.

(OEDIPUS *enters from the palace.*)

OEDIPUS

Jocasta, dearest wife, why hast thou summoned me forth from these doors?

JOCASTA

Hear this man, and judge, as thou listenest, to what the awful oracles of the gods have come.

OEDIPUS

And he—who may he be, and what news hath he for me?

JOCASTA

He is from Corinth, to tell that thy father Polybus lives no longer, but hath perished.

OEDIPUS

How, stranger? Let me have it from thine own mouth.

MESSENGER

If I must first make these tidings plain, know indeed that he is dead and gone.

OEDIPUS

By treachery, or by visit of disease?

MESSENGER

A light thing in the scale brings the aged to their rest.

OEDIPUS

Ah, he died, it seems, of sickness?

MESSENGER

Yea, and of the long years that he had told.

OEDIPUS

Alas, alas! Why, indeed, my wife, should one look to the hearth of the Pythian seer, or to the birds that scream above our heads, on whose showing I was doomed to slay my sire? But he is dead, and hid already beneath the earth; and here am I, who have not put hand to spear.—Unless, perchance, he was killed by longing for me: thus, indeed, I should be the cause of his death. But the oracles as they stand, at least, Polybus hath swept with him to his rest in Hades: they are worth nought.

JOCASTA

Nay, did I not so foretell to thee long since?

OEDIPUS

Thou didst: but I was misled by my fear.

JOCASTA

Now no more lay aught of those things to heart.

OEDIPUS

But surely I must needs fear my mother's bed?

JOCASTA

Nay, what should mortal fear, for whom the decrees of Fortune are supreme, and who hath clear foresight of nothing? 'Tis best to live at random, as one may. But fear not thou touching wedlock with thy mother. Many men ere now have so fared in dreams also: but he to whom these things are as nought bears his life most easily.

OEDIPUS

All these bold words of thine would have been well, were not my mother living; but as it is, since she lives, I must needs fear—though thou sayest well.

JOCASTA

Howbeit thy father's death is a great sign to cheer us.

OEDIPUS

Great, I know; but my fear is of her who lives.

MESSENGER

And who is the woman about whom ye fear?

OEDIPUS

Merope, old man, the consort of Polybus.

MESSENGER

And what is it in her that moves your fear?

OEDIPUS

A heaven-sent oracle of dread import, stranger.

MESSENGER

Lawful, or unlawful, for another to know?

OEDIPUS

Lawful, surely. Loxias once said that I was doomed to espouse mine own mother, and to shed with mine own hands my father's blood. Wherefore my home in Corinth was long kept by me afar; with happy event, indeed,—yet still 'tis sweet to see the face of parents.

MESSENGER

Was it indeed for fear of this that thou wast an exile from that city?

OEDIPUS

And because I wished not, old man, to be the slayer of my sire.

MESSENGER

Then why have I not freed thee, king, from this fear, seeing that I came with friendly purpose?

OEDIPUS

Indeed thou shouldst have guerdon due from me.

MESSENGER

Indeed 'twas chiefly for this that I came—that, on thy return home, I might reap some good.

OEDIPUS

Nay, I will never go near my parents.

MESSENGER

Ah my son, 'tis plain enough that thou knowest not what thou doest.

OEDIPUS

How, old man? For the gods' love, tell me.

MESSENGER

If for these reasons thou shrinkest from going home.

OEDIPUS

Aye, I dread lest Phoebus prove himself true for me.

MESSENGER

Thou dreadest to be stained with guilt through thy parents?

OEDIPUS

Even so, old man—this it is that ever affrights me.

MESSENGER

Dost thou know, then, that thy fears are wholly vain?

OEDIPUS

How so, if I was born of those parents?

MESSENGER

Because Polybus was nothing to thee in blood.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou? Was Polybus not my sire?

MESSENGER

No more than he who speaks to thee, but just so much.

OEDIPUS

And how can my sire be level with him who is as nought to me?

MESSENGER

Nay, he begat thee not, any more than I.

OEDIPUS

Nay, wherefore, then, called he me his son?

MESSENGER

Know that he had received thee as a gift from my hands of yore.

OEDIPUS

And yet he loved me so dearly, who came from another's hand?

MESSENGER

Yea, his former childlessness won him thereto.

OEDIPUS

And thou—hadst thou bought me or found me by chance, when thou gavest me to him?

MESSENGER

Found thee in Cithaeron's winding glens.

OEDIPUS

And wherefore wast thou roaming in those regions?

MESSENGER

I was there in charge of mountain flocks.

OEDIPUS

What, thou wast a shepherd—a vagrant hireling?

MESSENGER

But thy preserver, my son, in that hour.

OEDIPUS

And what pain was mine when thou didst take me in thine arms?

MESSENGER

The ankles of thy feet might witness.

OEDIPUS

Ah me, why dost thou speak of that old trouble?

MESSENGER

I freed thee when thou hadst thine ankles pinned together.

OEDIPUS

Aye, 'twas a dread brand of shame that I took from my cradle.

MESSENGER

Such, that from that fortune thou wast called by the name which still is thine.

OEDIPUS

Oh, for the gods' love—was the deed my mother's or father's? Speak!

MESSENGER

I know not; he who gave thee to me wots better of that than I.

OEDIPUS

What, thou hadst me from another? Thou didst not light on me thyself?

MESSENGER

No: another shepherd gave thee up to me.

OEDIPUS

Who was he? Art thou in case to tell clearly?

MESSENGER

I think he was called one of the household of Laius.

OEDIPUS

The king who ruled this country long ago?

MESSENGER

The same: 'twas in his service that the man was a herd.

OEDIPUS

Is he still alive, that I might see him?

MESSENGER

Nay, ye folk of the country should know best.

OEDIPUS

Is there any of you here present that knows the herd of whom he speaks —that hath seen him in the pastures or the town? Answer! The hour hath come that these things should be finally revealed.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Methinks he speaks of no other than the peasant whom thou wast already fain to see; but our lady Jocasta might best tell that.

OEDIPUS

Lady, wottest thou of him whom we lately summoned? Is it of him that this man speaks?

JOCASTA

Why ask of whom he spoke? Regard it not . . . waste not a thought on what he said . . . 'twere idle.

OEDIPUS

It must not be that, with such clues in my grasp, I should fail to bring my birth to light.

JOCASTA

For the gods' sake, if thou hast any care for thine own life, forbear this search! My anguish is enough.

OEDIPUS

Be of good courage; though I be found the son of servile mother,—aye, a slave by three descents,—*thou* wilt not be proved base-born.

JOCASTA

Yet hear me, I implore thee: do not thus.

OEDIPUS

I must not hear of not discovering the whole truth.

JOCASTA

Yet I wish thee well—I counsel thee for the best.

OEDIPUS

These best counsels, then, vex my patience.

JOCASTA

Ill-fated one! Mayst thou never come to know who thou art!

OEDIPUS

Go, some one, fetch me the herdsman hither,—and leave yon woman to glory in her princely stock.

JOCASTA

Alas, alas, miserable!—that word alone can I say unto thee, and no other word henceforth for ever.

(*She rushes into the palace.*)

LEADER

Why hath the lady gone, Oedipus, in a transport of wild grief? I misdoubt, a storm of sorrow will break forth from this silence.

OEDIPUS

Break forth what will! Be my race never so lowly, I must crave to learn it. Yon woman, perchance,—for she is proud with more than a woman's pride—thinks shame of my base source. But I, who hold myself son of Fortune that gives good, will not be dishonoured. She is the mother from whom I spring; and the months, my kinsmen, have marked me sometimes lowly, sometimes great. Such being my lineage, never more can I prove false to it, or spare to search out the secret of my birth.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

If I am a seer or wise of heart, O Cithaeron, thou shalt not fail—by yon heaven, thou shalt not!—to know at tomorrow's full moon that Oedipus honours thee as native to him, as his nurse, and his mother, and that thou art celebrated in our dance and song, because thou art well-pleasing to our prince. O Phoebus to whom we cry, may these things find favour in thy sight!

antistrophe

Who was it, my son, who of the race whose years are many that bore thee in wedlock with Pan, the mountain-roaming father? Or was it a bride of Loxias that bore thee? For dear to him are all the upland pastures. Or perchance 'twas Cyllene's lord,[2] or the Bacchants' god, dweller on the hill-tops, that received thee, a new-born joy, from one of the Nymphs of Helicon, with whom he most doth sport.

OEDIPUS

Elders, if 'tis for me to guess, who have never met with him, I think I see the herdsman of whom we have long been in quest; for in his venerable age he tallies with yon stranger's years, and withal I know those who bring him, methinks, as servants of mine own. But perchance thou mayest have the advantage of me in knowledge, if thou hast seen the herdsman before.

LEADER

Aye, I know him, be sure; he was in the service of Laius—trusty as any man, in his shepherd's place.

(*The* HERDSMAN *is brought in.*)

OEDIPUS

I ask thee first, Corinthian stranger, is this he whom thou meanest?

MESSENGER

This man whom thou beholdest.

OEDIPUS

Ho thou, old man—I would have thee look this way, and answer all that I ask thee. Thou wast once in the service of Laius?

HERDSMAN

I was—a slave not bought, but reared in his house.

OEDIPUS

Employed in what labour, or what way of life?

HERDSMAN

For the best part of my life I tended flocks.

OEDIPUS

And what the regions that thou didst chiefly haunt?

HERDSMAN

Sometimes it was Cithaeron, sometimes the neighbouring ground.

OEDIPUS

Then wottest thou of having noted yon man in these parts—

HERDSMAN

Doing what? . . . What man dost thou mean? . . .

OEDIPUS

This man here—or of having ever met him before?

HERDSMAN

Not so that I could speak at once from memory.

MESSENGER

And no wonder, master. But I will bring clear recollection to his ignorance. I am sure that he well wots of the time when we abode in the region of Cithaeron,—he with two flocks, I, his comrade, with one,—three full half-years, from spring to Arcturus; and then for the winter I used to drive my flock to mine own fold, and he took his to the fold of Laius. Did aught of this happen as I tell, or did it not?

HERDSMAN

Thou speakest the truth—though 'tis long ago.

MESSENGER

Come, tell me now—wottest thou of having given me a boy in those days, to be reared as mine own foster-son?

HERDSMAN
What now? Why dost thou ask the question?

MESSENGER
Yonder man, my friend, is he who then was young.

HERDSMAN
Plague seize thee—be silent once for all!

OEDIPUS
Ha! chide him not, old man—thy words need chiding more than his.

HERDSMAN
And wherein, most noble master, do I offend?

OEDIPUS
In not telling of the boy concerning whom he asks.

HERDSMAN
He speaks without knowledge—he is busy to no purpose.

OEDIPUS
Thou wilt not speak with a good grace, but thou shalt on pain.

HERDSMAN
Nay, for the gods' love, misuse not an old man!

OEDIPUS
Ho, some one—pinion him this instant!

HERDSMAN
Alas, wherefore? what more wouldst thou learn?

OEDIPUS
Didst thou give this man the child of whom he asks?

HERDSMAN
I did,—and would I had perished that day!

OEDIPUS
Well, thou wilt come to that, unless thou tell the honest truth.

HERDSMAN
Nay, much more am I lost, if I speak.

OEDIPUS
The fellow is bent, methinks, on more delays . . .

HERDSMAN

No, no!—I said before that I gave it to him.

OEDIPUS

Whence hadst thou got it? In thine own house, or from another?

HERDSMAN

Mine own it was not—I had received it from a man.

OEDIPUS

From whom of the citizens here? from what home?

HERDSMAN

Forbear, for the gods' love, master, forbear to ask more!

OEDIPUS

Thou art lost if I have to question thee again.

HERDSMAN

It was a child, then, of the house of Laius.

OEDIPUS

A slave? or one born of his own race?

HERDSMAN

Ah me—I am on the dreaded brink of speech.

OEDIPUS

And I of hearing; yet must I hear.

HERDSMAN

Thou must know, then, that 'twas said to be his own child—but thy lady within could best say how these things are.

OEDIPUS

How? She gave it to thee?

HERDSMAN

Yea, O king.

OEDIPUS

For what end?

HERDSMAN

That I should make away with it.

OEDIPUS

Her own child, the wretch?

HERDSMAN

Aye, from fear of evil prophecies.

OEDIPUS

What were they?

HERDSMAN

The tale ran that he must slay his sire.

OEDIPUS

Why, then, didst thou give him up to this old man?

HERDSMAN

Through pity, master, as deeming that he would bear him away to another land, whence he himself came; but he saved him for the direst woe. For if thou art what this man saith, know that thou wast born to misery.

OEDIPUS

Oh, oh! All brought to pass—all true! Thou light, may I now look my last on thee—I who have been found accursed in birth, accursed in wedlock, accursed in the shedding of blood!

(*He rushes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Alas, ye generations of men, how mere a shadow do I count your life! Where, where is the mortal who wins more of happiness than just the seeming, and, after the semblance, a falling away? Thine is a fate that warns me,—thine, thine, unhappy Oedipus—to call no earthly creature blest.

antistrophe 1

For he, O Zeus, sped his shaft with peerless skill, and won the prize of an all-prosperous fortune; he slew the maiden with crooked talons who sang darkly; he arose for our land as a tower against death. And from that time, Oedipus, thou hast been called our king, and hast been honoured supremely, bearing sway in great Thebes.

strophe 2

But now whose story is more grievous in men's ears? Who is a more wretched captive to fierce plagues and troubles, with all his life reversed?

Alas, renowned Oedipus! The same bounteous place of rest sufficed thee, as child and as sire also, that thou shouldst make thereon thy nuptial couch. Oh, how can the soil wherein thy father sowed, unhappy one, have suffered thee in silence so long?

antistrophe 2

Time the all-seeing hath found thee out in thy despite: he judgeth the monstrous marriage wherein begetter and begotten have long been one.

Alas, thou child of Laius, would, would that I had never seen thee! I wail as one who pours a dirge from his lips; sooth to speak, 'twas thou that gavest me new life, and through thee darkness hath fallen upon mine eyes.

(*Enter* SECOND MESSENGER *from the palace.*)

SECOND MESSENGER

Ye who are ever most honoured in this land, what deeds shall ye hear, what deeds behold, what burden of sorrow shall be yours, if, true to your race, ye still care for the house of Labdacus! For I ween that not Ister nor Phasis could wash this house clean, so many are the ills that it shrouds, or will soon bring to light,—ills wrought not unwittingly, but of purpose. And those griefs smart most which are seen to be of our own choice.

LEADER

Indeed those which we knew before fall not short of claiming sore lamentation: besides them, what dost thou announce?

SECOND MESSENGER

This is the shortest tale to tell and to hear: our royal lady Jocasta is dead.

LEADER

Alas, hapless one! From what cause?

SECOND MESSENGER

By her own hand. The worst pain in what hath chanced is not for you, for yours it is not to behold. Nevertheless, so far as mine own memory serves, ye shall learn that unhappy woman's fate.

When, frantic, she had passed within the vestibule, she rushed straight towards her nuptial couch, clutching her hair with the fingers of both hands; once within the chamber, she dashed the doors together at her back; then called on the name of Laïus, long since a corpse, mindful of that son, begotten long ago, by whom the sire was slain, leaving the mother to breed accursed offspring with his own.

And she bewailed the wedlock wherein, wretched, she had borne a two-fold brood, husband by husband, children by her child. And how thereafter she perished, is more than I know. For with a shriek Oedipus burst in, and suffered us not to watch her woe unto the end; on him, as he rushed around, our eyes were set. To and fro he went, asking us to give him a sword,—asking where he should find the wife who was no wife, but

a mother whose womb had borne alike himself and his children. And, in his frenzy, a power above man was his guide; for 'twas none of us mortals who were nigh. And with a dread shriek, as though some one beckoned him on, he sprang at the double doors, and from their sockets forced the bending bolts, and rushed into the room.

There beheld we the woman hanging by the neck in a twisted noose of swinging cords. But he, when he saw her, with a dread, deep cry of misery, loosed the halter whereby she hung. And when the hapless woman was stretched upon the ground, then was the sequel dread to see. For he tore from her raiment the golden brooches wherewith she was decked, and lifted them, and smote full on his own eye-balls, uttering words like these: 'No more shall ye behold such horrors as I was suffering and working! long enough have ye looked on those whom ye ought never to have seen, failed in knowledge of those whom I yearned to know—henceforth ye shall be dark!'

To such dire refrain, not once alone but oft struck he his eyes with lifted hand; and at each blow the ensanguined eye-balls bedewed his beard, nor sent forth sluggish drops of gore, but all at once a dark shower of blood came down like hail.

From the deeds of twain such ills have broken forth, not on one alone, but with mingled woe for man and wife. The old happiness of their ancestral fortune was aforetime happiness indeed; but to-day—lamentation, ruin, death, shame, all earthly ills that can be named—all, all are theirs.

LEADER

And hath the sufferer now any respite from pain?

SECOND MESSENGER

He cries for some one to unbar the gates and show to all the Cadmeans his father's slayer, his mother's—the unholy word must not pass my lips, —as purposing to cast himself out of the land, and abide no more, to make the house accursed under his own curse. Howbeit he lacks strength, and one to guide his steps; for the anguish is more than man may bear. And he will show this to thee also; for lo, the bars of the gates are withdrawn, and soon thou shalt behold a sight which even he who abhors it must pity.

(*The central door of the palace is now opened.* OEDIPUS *comes forth, leaning on attendants; the bloody stains are still upon his face. The following lines between* OEDIPUS *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

O dread fate for men to see, O most dreadful of all that have met mine eyes! Unhappy one, what madness hath come on thee? Who is the unearthly foe that, with a bound of more than mortal range, hath made thine ill-starred life his prey?

Alas, alas, thou hapless one! Nay, I cannot e'en look on thee, though there is much that I would fain ask, fain learn, much that draws my wistful gaze,—with such a shuddering dost thou fill me!

OEDIPUS

Woe is me! Alas, alas, wretched that I am! Whither, whither am I borne in my misery? How is my voice swept abroad on the wings of the air? Oh my Fate, how far hast thou sprung!

CHORUS

To a dread place, dire in men's ears, dire in their sight.

OEDIPUS

strophe 1

O thou horror of darkness that enfoldest me, visitant unspeakable, resistless, sped by a wind too fair!

Ay me! and once again, ay me!

How is my soul pierced by the stab of these goads, and withal by the memory of sorrows!

CHORUS

Yea, amid woes so many a twofold pain may well be thine to mourn and to bear.

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 1

Ah, friend, thou still art steadfast in thy tendance of me,—thou still hast patience to care for the blind man! Ah me! Thy presence is not hid from me—no, dark though I am, yet know I thy voice full well.

CHORUS

Man of dread deeds, how couldst thou in such wise quench thy vision? What more than human power urged thee?

OEDIPUS

strophe 2

Apollo, friends, Apollo was he that brought these my woes to pass, these my sore, sore woes: but the hand that struck the eyes was none save mine, wretched that I am! Why was I to see, when sight could show me nothing sweet?

CHORUS

These things were even as thou sayest.

OEDIPUS

Say, friends, what can I more behold, what can I love, what greeting can touch mine ear with joy? Haste, lead me from the land, friends, lead me hence, the utterly lost, the thrice accursed, yea, the mortal most abhorred of heaven!

CHORUS

Wretched alike for thy fortune and for thy sense thereof, would that I had never so much as known thee!

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 2

Perish the man, whoe'er he was, that freed me in the pastures from the cruel shackle on my feet, and saved me from death, and gave me back to life,—a thankless deed! Had I died then, to my friends and to thine own soul I had not been so sore a grief.

CHORUS

I also would have had it thus.

OEDIPUS

So had I not come to shed my father's blood, nor been called among men the spouse of her from whom I sprang: but now am I forsaken of the gods, son of a defiled mother, successor to his bed who gave me mine own wretched being: and if there be yet a woe surpassing woes, it hath become the portion of Oedipus.

CHORUS

I know not how I can say that thou hast counselled well: for thou wert better dead than living and blind.

OEDIPUS

Show me not at large that these things are not best done thus: give me counsel no more. For, had I sight, I know not with what eyes I could e'en have looked on my father, when I came to the place of the dead, aye, or on my miserable mother, since against both I have sinned such sins as strangling could not punish. But deem ye that the sight of children, born as mine were born, was lovely for me to look upon? No, no, not lovely to mine eyes for ever! No, nor was this town with its towered walls, nor the sacred statues of the gods, since I, thrice wretched that I am,—I, noblest of the sons of Thebes,—have doomed myself to know these no more, by mine own command that all should thrust away the impious one,

—even him whom gods have shown to be unholy—and of the race of Laïus!

After bearing such a stain upon me, was I to look with steady eyes on this folk? No, verily: no, were there yet a way to choke the fount of hearing, I had not spared to make a fast prison of this wretched frame, that so I should have known nor sight nor sound; for 'tis sweet that our thought should dwell beyond the sphere of griefs.

Alas, Cithaeron, why hadst thou a shelter for me? When I was given to thee, why didst thou not slay me straightway, that so I might never have revealed my source to men? Ah, Polybus,—ah, Corinth, and thou that wast called the ancient house of my fathers, how seeming-fair was I your nurseling, and what ills were festering beneath! For now I am found evil, and of evil birth. O ye three roads, and thou secret glen,—thou coppice, and narrow way where three paths met—ye who drank from my hands that father's blood which was mine own,—remember ye, perchance, what deeds I wrought for you to see,—and then, when I came hither, what fresh deeds I went on to do?

O marriage-rites, ye gave me birth, and when ye had brought me forth, again ye bore children to your child, ye created an incestuous kinship of fathers, brothers, sons,—brides, wives, mothers,—yea, all the foulest shame that is wrought among men! Nay, but 'tis unmeet to name what 'tis unmeet to do:—haste ye, for the gods' love, hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where ye shall never behold me more! Approach,—deign to lay your hands on a wretched man; —hearken, fear not,—my plague can rest on no mortal beside.

(*Enter* CREON)

LEADER

Nay, here is Creon, in meet season for thy requests, crave they act or counsel; for he alone is left to guard the land in thy stead.

OEDIPUS

Ah me, how indeed shall I accost him? What claim to credence can be shown on my part? For in the past I have been found wholly false to him.

CREON

I have not come in mockery, Oedipus, nor to reproach thee with any bygone fault. (*To the attendants.*) But ye, if ye respect the children of men no more, revere at least the all-nurturing flame of our lord the Sun,—spare to show thus nakedly a pollution such as this,—one which neither earth can welcome, nor the holy rain, nor the light. Nay, take him into the house as quickly as ye may; for it best accords with piety that kinsfolk alone should see and hear a kinsman's woes.

OEDIPUS

For the gods' love—since thou hast done a gentle violence to my presage, who hast come in a spirit so noble to me, a man most vile—grant me a boon:—for thy good I will speak, not for mine own.

CREON

And what wish art thou so fain to have of me?

OEDIPUS

Cast me out of this land with all speed, to a place where no mortal shall be found to greet me more.

CREON

This would I have done, be thou sure, but that I craved first to learn all my duty from the god.

OEDIPUS

Nay, his behest hath been set forth in full,—to let me perish, the parricide, the unholy one, that I am.

CREON

Such was the purport; yet, seeing to what a pass we have come, 'tis better to learn clearly what should be done.

OEDIPUS

Will ye, then, seek a response on behalf of such a wretch as I am?

CREON

Aye, for thou thyself wilt now surely put faith in the god.

OEDIPUS

Yea; and on thee lay I this charge, to thee will I make this entreaty:—give to her who is within such burial as thou thyself wouldest; for thou wilt meetly render the last rites to thine own. But for me—never let this city of my sire be condemned to have me dwelling therein, while I live: no, suffer me to abide on the hills, where yonder is Cithaeron, famed as mine,—which my mother and sire, while they lived, set for my appointed tomb,—that so I may die by their decree who sought to slay me. Howbeit of thus much am I sure,—that neither sickness nor aught else can destroy me; for never had I been snatched from death, but in reserve for some strange doom.

Nay, let *my* fate go whither it will: but as touching my children,—I pray thee, Creon, take no care on thee for my sons; they are men, so that, be they where they may, they can never lack the means to live. But my two girls, poor hapless ones,—who never knew my table spread apart, or lacked their father's presence, but ever in all things shared my daily

bread,—I pray thee, care for *them;* and—if thou canst—suffer me to touch them with my hands, and to indulge my grief. Grant it, prince, grant it, thou noble heart! Ah, could I but once touch them with my hands, I should think that they were with me, even as when I had sight. . .

(CREON'S *attendants lead in the children* ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.)

Ha? O ye gods, can it be my loved ones that I hear sobbing,—can Creon have taken pity on me and sent me my children—my darlings? Am I right?

CREON

Yea: 'tis of my contriving, for I knew thy joy in them of old,—the joy that now is thine.

OEDIPUS

Then blessed be thou, and, for guerdon of this errand, may heaven prove to thee a kinder guardian than it hath to me! My children, where are ye? Come hither,—hither to the hands of him whose mother was your own, the hands whose offices have wrought that your sire's once bright eyes should be such orbs as these,—his, who seeing nought, knowing nought, became your father by her from whom he sprang! For you also do I weep—behold you I cannot—when I think of the bitter life in days to come which men will make you live. To what company of the citizens will ye go, to what festival, from which ye shall not return home in tears, instead of sharing in the holiday? But when ye are now come to years ripe for marriage, who shall he be, who shall be the man, my daughters, that will hazard taking unto him such reproaches as must be baneful alike to my offspring and to yours? For what misery is wanting? Your sire slew his sire, he had seed of her who bare him, and begat you at the sources of his own being! Such are the taunts that will be cast at you; and who then will wed? The man lives not, no, it cannot be, my children, but ye must wither in barren maidenhood.

Ah, son of Menoeceus, hear me—since thou art the only father left to them, for we, their parents, are lost, both of us,—allow them not to wander poor and unwed, who are thy kinswomen, nor abase them to the level of my woes. Nay, pity them, when thou seest them at this tender age so utterly forlorn, save for thee. Signify thy promise, generous man, by the touch of thy hand! To you, my children, I would have given much counsel, were your minds mature; but now I would have this to be your prayer —that ye live where occasion suffers, and that the life which is your portion may be happier than your sire's.

CREON

Thy grief hath had large scope enough: nay, pass into the house.

OEDIPUS

I must obey, though 'tis in no wise sweet.

CREON

Yea: for it is in season that all things are good.

OEDIPUS

Knowest thou, then, on what conditions I will go?

CREON

Thou shalt name them; so shall I know them when I hear.

OEDIPUS

See that thou send me to dwell beyond this land.

CREON

Thou askest me for what the god must give.

OEDIPUS

Nay, to the gods I have become most hateful.

CREON

Then shalt thou have thy wish anon.

OEDIPUS

So thou consentest?

CREON

'Tis not my wont to speak idly what I do not mean.

OEDIPUS

Then 'tis time to lead me hence.

CREON

Come, then,—but let thy children go.

OEDIPUS

Nay, take not these from me!

CREON

Crave not to be master in all things: for the mastery which thou didst win hath not followed thee through life.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Dwellers in our native Thebes, behold, this is Oedipus, who knew the famed riddle, and was a man most mighty; on whose fortunes what citizen did not gaze with envy? Behold into what a stormy sea of dread trouble he hath come!

Therefore, while our eyes wait to see the destined final day, we must call no one happy who is of mortal race, until he hath crossed life's border, free from pain.[3]

NOTES FOR OEDIPUS THE KING

1. Jebb has inserted this line for one which he believes has been lost.
2. The reference is to Hermes.
3. These last lines evidently derive from a maxim traditionally attributed to Solon in antiquity. The thought is found frequently in Greek tragedy.

III
ANTIGONE

Characters in the Play

Antigone, Ismene — *daughters of Oedipus*
Creon, *King of Thebes*
Eurydice, *his wife*
Haemon, *his son*
Teiresias, *the blind prophet*
Guard, *set to watch the corpse of Polyneices*
First Messenger
Second Messenger, *from the house*
Chorus of Theban Elders

INTRODUCTION

THREE of the extant plays of Sophocles interpret aspects of the familiar Theban saga. The *Antigone,* the earliest of the three, being written probably about 442 B.C., treats the latest events of the legend. The second, *Oedipus the King,* deals with the early part of the story, while the third, *Oedipus at Colonus,* the crowning achievement of Sophocles' old age, presents the last hours and death of Oedipus, which in the chronology of the legend fall between the episodes of *Oedipus the King* and the *Antigone.* Although Sophocles follows in its general outlines the received version of the legend, he has not scrupled to alter it or change its emphases in order to serve his own particular dramatic purpose. For example, Creon is a very sympathetic character in *Oedipus the King,* whereas he is portrayed quite differently in the *Antigone.*

According to the legend, Eteocles, son of Oedipus and now king of Thebes, had exiled his brother, Polyneices, who also desired to hold the royal power. Polyneices had enlisted the support of Argos, and had led a tremendous host against Thebes in order to seize the throne. In the battle which then ensued, the brothers, who met in individual combat, fell each by the other's hand, and fulfilled thereby the curse which their father, Oedipus, had called down upon them just before his death. The Argive host has been repulsed, and Creon has assumed the vacant throne. The action of the *Antigone* takes place on the day after the battle. Creon has just issued a proclamation that the body of Eteocles shall be given the full funeral honours due a hero, while the corpse of Polyneices shall lie unburied. At this point the play opens.

The central conflict of the play between Antigone and Creon is presented in simple terms, and derives, on the surface, from the conventional Greek attitude towards burial ritual. Creon has inflicted upon the dead Polyneices a punishment which the Greeks looked upon with peculiar terror, namely that his body should not receive the requisite funeral rites. In fact, the problem is precisely that which preoccupied Sophocles in the closing scenes of his *Ajax.* However, in the *Antigone,* the poet has universalized the conflict which arises from this particular situation, until it becomes basically a question whether man-made and tyrannically en-

forced law should take precedence over what any individual conceives in his heart to be divine law. Creon endeavours to impose his human law on Antigone, who disobeys out of respect for a higher law.

Creon is distinctly a tragic figure, who holds firmly to what he believes to be right and who has no doubts as to the absolute validity of his beliefs. Nothing shakes him, not even the criticism and open opposition of his son, Haemon, with whom Creon is sharply contrasted, until it is too late and the catastrophe has already occurred. Creon gains in stature at the conclusion because he realizes his guilt and assumes responsibility for it. In many respects he is not unlike Pentheus, in Euripides' *Bacchae.* As for Antigone, critics are divided in their interpretations. Some hold that she is guilty of pride, *hybris,* and that she is sufferng from an absurd and stubborn desire to become a martyr. Others insist that she is unswervingly and magnificently devoted to her ideals for which she is willing to sacrifice her life, that she does not possess any "tragic flaw" in any sense of the word, and that her fate is completely undeserved. Whatever may be a satisfactory interpretation of her character, at least it is certain that Sophocles has created a living and a vital figure in Antigone. Her devotion to her ideals may perhaps lead her to a somewhat uncompromising harshness towards her sister, but Sophocles makes it clear that she has within her a warmth and gentleness of spirit which she has suppressed but which are revealed, now in her love for Haemon, and now when she asks pathetically, as she is led away to death, why it is that she suffers.

One is tempted to formulate clearly the major issues of the play and forget that they are fused with other varied elements in such a way that the resultant work of art possesses great richness. To cite examples of this richness, one need only mention the brilliant choral ode on the wonders of man, the realistic and somewhat comic treatment of the Guard, or the scene between Haemon and Creon which contains political implications of great significance. As a result, though the *Antigone* may not be the equal of *Oedipus the King,* either in point of technique or of universal meaning, yet it remains one of the most satisfying of all the Greek tragedies.

ANTIGONE

(SCENE:—*The same as in the Oedipus the King, an open space before the royal palace, once that of Oedipus, at Thebes. The backscene represents the front of the palace, with three doors, of which the central and largest is the principal entrance into the house. The time is at daybreak on the morning after the fall of the two brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, and the flight of the defeated Argives.* ANTIGONE *calls* ISMENE *forth from the palace, in order to speak to her alone.*)

ANTIGONE

ISMENE, sister, mine own dear sister, knowest thou what ill there is, of all bequeathed by Oedipus, that Zeus fulfils not for us twain while we live? Nothing painful is there, nothing fraught with ruin, no shame, no dishonour, that I have not seen in thy woes and mine.

And now what new edict is this of which they tell, that our Captain hath just published to all Thebes? Knowest thou aught? Hast thou heard? Or is it hidden from thee that our friends are threatened with the doom of our foes?

ISMENE

No word of friends, Antigone, gladsome or painful, hath come to me, since we two sisters were bereft of brothers twain, killed in one day by a twofold blow; and since in this last night the Argive host hath fled, I know no more, whether my fortune be brighter, or more grievous.

ANTIGONE

I knew it well, and therefore sought to bring thee beyond the gates of the court, that thou mightest hear alone.

ISMENE

What is it? 'Tis plain that thou art brooding on some dark tidings.

ANTIGONE

What, hath not Creon destined our brothers, the one to honoured burial, the other to unburied shame? Eteocles, they say, with due observance of right and custom, he hath laid in the earth, for his honour among the

dead below. But the hapless corpse of Polyneices—as rumour saith, it hath been published to the town that none shall entomb him or mourn, but leave unwept, unsepulchred, a welcome store for the birds, as they espy him, to feast on at will.

Such, 'tis said, is the edict that the good Creon hath set forth for thee and for me,—yes, for *me*,—and is coming hither to proclaim it clearly to those who know it not; nor counts the matter light, but, whoso disobeys in aught, his doom is death by stoning before all the folk. Thou knowest it now; and thou wilt soon show whether thou art nobly bred, or the base daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE

Poor sister,—and if things stand thus, what could I help to do or undo?

ANTIGONE

Consider if thou wilt share the toil and the deed.

ISMENE

In what venture? What can be thy meaning?

ANTIGONE

Wilt thou aid this hand to lift the dead?

ISMENE

Thou wouldst bury him,—when 'tis forbidden to Thebes?

ANTIGONE

I will do my part,—and thine, if thou wilt not,—to a brother. False to him will I never be found.

ISMENE

Ah, over-bold! when Creon hath forbidden?

ANTIGONE

Nay, he hath no right to keep me from mine own.

ISMENE

Ah me! think, sister, how our father perished, amid hate and scorn, when sins bared by his own search had moved him to strike both eyes with self-blinding hand; then the mother wife, two names in one, with twisted noose did despite unto her life; and last, our two brothers in one day,—each shedding, hapless one, a kinsman's blood,—wrought out with mutual hands their common doom. And now *we* in turn—we two left all alone—think how we shall perish, more miserably than all the rest, if, in defiance of the law, we brave a king's decree or his powers. Nay, we must remember, first, that we were born women, as who should not strive with men;

next, that we are ruled of the stronger, so that we must obey in these things, and in things yet sorer. I, therefore, asking the Spirits Infernal to pardon, seeing that force is put on me herein, will hearken to our rulers; for 'tis witless to be over busy.

ANTIGONE

I will not urge thee,—no, nor, if thou yet shouldst have the mind, wouldst thou be welcome as a worker with *me*. Nay, be what thou wilt; but I will bury him: well for me to die in doing that. I shall rest, a loved one with him whom I have loved, sinless in my crime; for I owe a longer allegiance to the dead than to the living: in that world I shall abide for ever. But if *thou* wilt, be guilty of dishonouring laws which the gods have stablished in honour.

ISMENE

I do them no dishonour; but to defy the State,—I have no strength for that.

ANTIGONE

Such be thy plea:—I, then, will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

ISMENE

Alas, unhappy one! How I fear for thee!

ANTIGONE

Fear not for me: guide thine own fate aright.

ISMENE

At least, then, disclose this plan to none, but hide it closely,—and so, too, will I.

ANTIGONE

Oh, denounce it! Thou wilt be far more hateful for thy silence, if thou proclaim not these things to all.

ISMENE

Thou hast a hot heart for chilling deeds.

ANTIGONE

I know that I please where I am most bound to please.

ISMENE

Aye, if thou canst; but thou wouldst what thou canst not.

ANTIGONE

Why, then, when my strength fails, I shall have done.

ISMENE

A hopeless quest should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

If thus thou speakest, thou wilt have hatred from me, and will justly be subject to the lasting hatred of the dead. But leave me, and the folly that is mine alone, to suffer this dread thing; for I shall not suffer aught so dreadful as an ignoble death.

ISMENE

Go, then, if thou must; and of this be sure,—that, though thine errand is foolish, to thy dear ones thou art truly dear.

(*Exit* ANTIGONE *on the spectators' left.* ISMENE *retires into the palace by one of the two side-doors. When they have departed, the* CHORUS OF THEBAN ELDERS *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Beam of the sun, fairest light that ever dawned on Thebe of the seven gates, thou hast shone forth at last, eye of golden day, arisen above Dirce's streams! The warrior of the white shield, who came from Argos in his panoply, hath been stirred by thee to headlong flight, in swifter career;

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

systema 1

who set forth against our land by reason of the vexed claims of Polyneices; and, like shrill-screaming eagle, he flew over into our land, in snow-white pinion sheathed, with an armèd throng, and with plumage of helms.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

He paused above our dwellings; he ravened around our sevenfold portals with spears athirst for blood; but he went hence, or ever his jaws were glutted with our gore, or the Fire-god's pine-fed flame had seized our crown of towers. So fierce was the noise of battle raised behind him, a thing too hard for him to conquer, as he wrestled with his dragon foe.

LEADER

systema 2

For Zeus utterly abhors the boasts of a proud tongue; and when he beheld them coming on in a great stream, in the haughty pride of

clanging gold, he smote with brandished fire one who was now hasting to shout victory at his goal upon our ramparts.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Swung down, he fell on the earth with a crash, torch in hand, he who so lately, in the frenzy of the mad onset, was raging against us with the blasts of his tempestuous hate. But those threats fared not as he hoped; and to other foes the mighty War-god dispensed their several dooms, dealing havoc around, a mighty helper at our need.

LEADER

systema 3

For seven captains at seven gates, matched against seven, left the tribute of their panoplies to Zeus who turns the battle; save those two of cruel fate, who, born of one sire and one mother, set against each other their twain conquering spears, and are sharers in a common death.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

But since Victory of glorious name hath come to us, with joy responsive to the joy of Thebe whose chariots are many, let us enjoy forgetfulness after the late wars, and visit all the temples of the gods with night-long dance and song; and may Bacchus be our leader, whose dancing shakes the land of Thebe.

LEADER

systema 4

But lo, the king of the land comes yonder, Creon, son of Menoeceus, our new ruler by the new fortunes that the gods have given; what counsel is he pondering, that he hath proposed this special conference of elders, summoned by his general mandate?

(*Enter* CREON, *from the central doors of the palace, in the garb of king, with two attendants.*)

CREON

Sirs, the vessel of our State, after being tossed on wild waves, hath once more been safely steadied by the gods: and ye, out of all the folk, have been called apart by my summons, because I knew, first of all, how true and constant was your reverence for the royal power of Laïus; how, again, when Oedipus was ruler of our land, and when he had perished, your steadfast loyalty still upheld their children. Since, then, his sons have fallen in one day by a twofold doom,—each smitten by the other,

each stained with a brother's blood,—I now possess the throne and all its powers, by nearness of kinship to the dead.

No man can be fully known, in soul and spirit and mind, until he hath been seen versed in rule and law-giving. For if any, being supreme guide of the State, cleaves not to the best counsels, but, through some fear, keeps his lips locked, I hold, and have ever held, him most base; and if any makes a friend of more account than his fatherland, that man hath no place in my regard. For I—be Zeus my witness, who sees all things always—would not be silent if I saw ruin, instead of safety, coming to the citizens; nor would I ever deem the country's foe a friend to myself; remembering this, that our country is the ship that bears us safe, and that only while she prospers in our voyage can we make true friends.

Such are the rules by which I guard this city's greatness. And in accord with them is the edict which I have now published to the folk touching the sons of Oedipus;—that Eteocles, who hath fallen fighting for our city, in all renown of arms, shall be entombed, and crowned with every rite that follows the noblest dead to their rest. But for his brother, Polyneices,—who came back from exile, and sought to consume utterly with fire the city of his fathers and the shrines of his fathers' gods,—sought to taste of kindred blood, and to lead the remnant into slavery;—touching this man, it hath been proclaimed to our people that none shall grace him with sepulture or lament, but leave him unburied, a corpse for birds and dogs to eat, a ghastly sight of shame.

Such the spirit of my dealing; and never, by deed of mine, shall the wicked stand in honour before the just; but whoso hath good will to Thebes, he shall be honoured of me, in his life and in his death.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Such is thy pleasure, Creon, son of Menoeceus, touching this city's foe, and its friend; and thou hast power, I ween, to take what order thou wilt, both for the dead, and for all us who live.

CREON

See, then, that ye be guardians of the mandate.

LEADER

Lay the burden of this task on some younger man.

CREON

Nay, watchers of the corpse have been found.

LEADER

What, then, is this further charge that thou wouldst give?

CREON

That ye side not with the breakers of these commands.

LEADER

No man is so foolish that he is enamoured of death.

CREON

In sooth, that is the meed; yet lucre hath oft ruined men through their hopes.

(*A* GUARD *enters from the spectators' left.*)

GUARD

My liege, I will not say that I come breathless from speed, or that I have plied a nimble foot; for often did my thoughts make me pause, and wheel round in my path, to return. My mind was holding large discourse with me; 'Fool, why goest thou to thy certain doom?' 'Wretch, tarrying again? And if Creon hears this from another, must not thou smart for it?' So debating, I went on my way with lagging steps, and thus a short road was made long. At last, however, it carried the day that I should come hither—to thee; and, though my tale be nought, yet will I tell it; for I come with a good grip on one hope,—that I can suffer nothing but what is my fate.

CREON

And what is it that disquiets thee thus?

GUARD

I wish to tell thee first about myself—I did not do the deed—I did not see the doer—it were not right that I should come to any harm.

CREON

Thou hast a shrewd eye for thy mark; well dost thou fence thyself round against the blame; clearly thou hast some strange thing to tell.

GUARD

Aye, truly; dread news makes one pause long.

CREON

Then tell it, wilt thou, and so get thee gone?

GUARD

Well, this is it.—The corpse—some one hath just given it burial, and gone away,—after sprinkling thirsty dust on the flesh, with such other rites as piety enjoins.

CREON

What sayest thou? What living man hath dared this deed?

GUARD

I know not; no stroke of pickaxe was seen there, no earth thrown up by mattock; the ground was hard and dry, unbroken, without track of wheels; the doer was one who had left no trace. And when the first day-watchman showed it to us, sore wonder fell on all. The dead man was veiled from us; not shut within a tomb, but lightly strewn with dust, as by the hand of one who shunned a curse. And no sign met the eye as though any beast of prey or any dog had come nigh to him, or torn him.

Then evil words flew fast and loud among us, guard accusing guard; and it would e'en have come to blows at last, nor was there any to hinder. Every man was the culprit, and no one was convicted, but all disclaimed knowledge of the deed. And we were ready to take red-hot iron in our hands;—to walk through fire;—to make oath by the gods that we had not done the deed,—that we were not privy to the planning or the doing.

At last, when all our searching was fruitless, one spake, who made us all bend our faces on the earth in fear; for we saw not how we could gainsay him, or escape mischance if we obeyed. His counsel was that this deed must be reported to thee, and not hidden. And this seemed best; and the lot doomed my hapless self to win this prize. So here I stand,—as unwelcome as unwilling, well I wot; for no man delights in the bearer of bad news.

LEADER

O king, my thoughts have long been whispering, can this deed, perchance, be e'en the work of gods?

CREON

Cease, ere thy words fill me utterly with wrath, lest thou be found at once an old man and foolish. For thou sayest what is not to be borne, in saying that the gods have care for this corpse. Was it for high reward of trusty service that they sought to hide his nakedness, who came to burn their pillared shrines and sacred treasures, to burn their land, and scatter its laws to the winds? Or dost thou behold the gods honouring the wicked? It cannot be. No! From the first there were certain in the town that muttered against me, chafing at this edict, wagging their heads in secret; and kept not their necks duly under the yoke, like men contented with my sway.

'Tis by them, well I know, that these have been beguiled and bribed to do this deed. Nothing so evil as money ever grew to be current among men. This lays cities low, this drives men from their homes, this trains and warps honest souls till they set themselves to works of shame; this

still teaches folk to practise villainies, and to know every godless deed.

But all the men who wrought this thing for hire have made it sure that, soon or late, they shall pay the price. Now, as Zeus still hath my reverence, know this—I tell it thee on my oath:—If ye find not the very author of this burial, and produce him before mine eyes, death alone shall not be enough for you, till first, hung up alive, ye have revealed this outrage,—that henceforth ye may thieve with better knowledge whence lucre should be won, and learn that it is not well to love gain from every source. For thou wilt find that ill-gotten pelf brings more men to ruin than to weal.

GUARD

May I speak? Or shall I just turn and go?

CREON

Knowest thou not that even now thy voice offends?

GUARD

Is thy smart in the ears, or in the soul?

CREON

And why wouldst thou define the seat of my pain?

GUARD

The doer vexes thy mind, but I, thine ears.

CREON

Ah, thou art a born babbler, 'tis well seen.

GUARD

May be, but never the doer of this deed.

CREON

Yea, and more,—the seller of thy life for silver.

GUARD

Alas! 'Tis sad, truly, that he who judges should misjudge.

CREON

Let thy fancy play with 'judgment' as it will;—but, if ye show me not the doers of these things, ye shall avow that dastardly gains work sorrows.

(CREON *goes into the palace.*)

GUARD

Well, may he be found! so 'twere best. But, be he caught or be he not—fortune must settle that—truly thou wilt not see me here again. Saved, even now, beyond hope and thought, I owe the gods great thanks.

(*The* GUARD *goes out on the spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Earth, the eldest of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear, turning the soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from year to year.

antistrophe 1

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts, and the sea-brood of the deep, he snares in the meshes of his woven toils, he leads captive, man excellent in wit. And he masters by his arts the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he tames the tireless mountain bull.

strophe 2

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould a state, hath he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the frost, when 'tis hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows of the rushing rain; yea, he hath resource for all; without resource he meets nothing that must come: only against Death shall he call for aid in vain; but from baffling maladies he hath devised escapes.

antistrophe 2

Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him, now to evil, now to good. When he honours the laws of the land, and that justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold, proudly stands his city: no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin. Never may he share my hearth, never think my thoughts, who doth these things!

(*Enter the* GUARD *on the spectators' left, leading in* ANTIGONE.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What portent from the gods is this?—my soul is amazed. I know her—how can I deny that yon maiden is Antigone?

O hapless, and child of hapless sire,—of Oedipus! What means this? Thou brought a prisoner?—thou, disloyal to the king's laws, and taken in folly?

GUARD

Here she is, the doer of the deed:—we caught this girl burying him:—but where is Creon?

(CREON *enters hurriedly from the palace.*)

LEADER

Lo, he comes forth again from the house, at our need.

CREON

What is it? What hath chanced, that makes my coming timely?

GUARD

O king, against nothing should men pledge their word; for the afterthought belies the first intent. I could have vowed that I should not soon be here again,—scared by thy threats, with which I had just been lashed: but,—since the joy that surprises and transcends our hopes is like in fulness to no other pleasure,—I have come, though 'tis in breach of my sworn oath, bringing this maid; who was taken showing grace to the dead. This time there was no casting of lots; no, this luck hath fallen to me, and to none else. And now, sire, take her thyself, question her, examine her, as thou wilt; but I have a right to free and final quittance of this trouble.

CREON

And thy prisoner here—how and whence hast thou taken her?

GUARD

She was burying the man; thou knowest all.

CREON

Dost thou mean what thou sayest? Dost thou speak aright?

GUARD

I saw her burying the corpse that thou hadst forbidden to bury. Is that plain and clear?

CREON

And how was she seen? how taken in the act?

GUARD

It befell on this wise. When we had come to the place,—with those dread menaces of thine upon us,—we swept away all the dust that covered the corpse, and bared the dank body well; and then sat us down on the brow of the hill, to windward, heedful that the smell from him should not strike us; every man was wide awake, and kept his neighbour alert with torrents of threats, if anyone should be careless of this task.

So went it, until the sun's bright orb stood in mid heaven, and the heat began to burn: and then suddenly a whirlwind lifted from the earth a

storm of dust, a trouble in the sky, and filled the plain, marring all the leafage of its woods; and the wide air was choked therewith: we closed our eyes, and bore the plague from the gods.

And when, after a long while, this storm had passed, the maid was seen; and she cried aloud with the sharp cry of a bird in its bitterness,—even as when, within the empty nest, it sees the bed stripped of its nestlings. So she also, when she saw the corpse bare, lifted up a voice of wailing, and called down curses on the doers of that deed. And straightway she brought thirsty dust in her hands; and from a shapely ewer of bronze, held high, with thrice-poured drink-offering she crowned the dead.

We rushed forward when we saw it, and at once closed upon our quarry, who was in no wise dismayed. Then we taxed her with her past and present doings; and she stood not on denial of aught,—at once to my joy and to my pain. To have escaped from ills one's self is a great joy; but 'tis painful to bring friends to ill. Howbeit, all such things are of less account to me than mine own safety.

CREON

Thou—thou whose face is bent to earth—dost thou avow, or disavow, this deed?

ANTIGONE

I avow it; I make no denial.

CREON (*to* GUARD)

Thou canst betake thee whither thou wilt, free and clear of a grave charge.

(*Exit* GUARD)

(*To* ANTIGONE) Now, tell me thou—not in many words, but briefly—knewest thou that an edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE

I knew it: could I help it? It was public.

CREON

And thou didst indeed dare to transgress that law?

ANTIGONE

Yes; for it was not Zeus that had published me that edict; not such are the laws set among men by the Justice who dwells with the gods below; nor deemed I that thy decrees were of such force, that a mortal could override the unwritten and unfailing statutes of heaven. For their life is not of to-day or yesterday, but from all time, and no man knows when they were first put forth.

Not through dread of any human pride could I answer to the gods for

breaking *these*. Die I must,—I knew that well (how should I not?)—even without thy edicts. But if I am to die before my time, I count that a gain: for when any one lives, as I do, compassed about with evils, can such an one find aught but gain in death?

So for me to meet this doom is trifling grief; but if I had suffered my mother's son to lie in death an unburied corpse, that would have grieved me; for this, I am not grieved. And if my present deeds are foolish in thy sight, it may be that a foolish judge arraigns my folly.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The maid shows herself passionate child of passionate sire, and knows not how to bend before troubles.

CREON

Yet I would have thee know that o'er-stubborn spirits are most often humbled; 'tis the stiffest iron, baked to hardness in the fire, that thou shalt oftenest see snapped and shivered; and I have known horses that show temper brought to order by a little curb; there is no room for pride, when thou art thy neighbour's slave.—This girl was already versed in insolence when she transgressed the laws that had been set forth; and, that done, lo, a second insult,—to vaunt of this, and exult in her deed.

Now verily I am no man, she is the man, if this victory shall rest with her, and bring no penalty. No! be she sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any that worships Zeus at the altar of our house,—she and her kinsfolk shall not avoid a doom most dire; for indeed I charge that other with a like share in the plotting of this burial.

And summon her—for I saw her e'en now within,—raving, and not mistress of her wits. So oft, before the deed, the mind stands self-convicted in its treason, when folks are plotting mischief in the dark. But verily this, too, is hateful,—when one who hath been caught in wickedness then seeks to make the crime a glory.

ANTIGONE

Wouldst thou do more than take and slay me?

CREON

No more, indeed; having that, I have all.

ANTIGONE

Why then dost thou delay? In thy discourse there is nought that pleases me,—never may there be!—and so my words must needs be unpleasing to thee. And yet, for glory—whence could I have won a nobler, than by giving burial to mine own brother? All here would own that they thought it well, were not their lips sealed by fear. But royalty, blest in so much besides, hath the power to do and say what it will.

CREON
Thou differest from all these Thebans in that view.

ANTIGONE
These also share it; but they curb their tongues for thee.

CREON
And art thou not ashamed to act apart from them?

ANTIGONE
No; there is nothing shameful in piety to a brother.

CREON
Was it not a brother, too, that died in the opposite cause?

ANTIGONE
Brother by the same mother and the same sire.

CREON
Why, then, dost thou render a grace that is impious in his sight?

ANTIGONE
The dead man will not say that he so deems it.

CREON
Yea, if thou makest him but equal in honour with the wicked.

ANTIGONE
It was his brother, not his slave, that perished.

CREON
Wasting this land; while *he* fell as its champion.

ANTIGONE
Nevertheless, Hades desires these rites.

CREON
But the good desires not a like portion with the evil.

ANTIGONE
Who knows but this seems blameless in the world below?

CREON
A foe is never a friend—not even in death.

ANTIGONE
'Tis not my nature to join in hating, but in loving.

CREON

Pass, then, to the world of the dead, and, if thou must needs love, love them. While I live, no woman shall rule me.

(*Enter* ISMENE *from the house, led in by two attendants.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo, yonder Ismene comes forth, shedding such tears as fond sisters weep; a cloud upon her brow casts its shadow over her darkly-flushing face, and breaks in rain on her fair cheek.

CREON

And thou, who, lurking like a viper in my house, wast secretly draining my life-blood, while I knew not that I was nurturing two pests, to rise against my throne—come, tell me now, wilt thou also confess thy part in this burial, or wilt thou forswear all knowledge of it?

ISMENE

I have done the deed,—if she allows my claim,—and share the burden of the charge.

ANTIGONE

Nay, justice will not suffer thee to do that: thou didst not consent to the deed, nor did I give thee part in it.

ISMENE

But, now that ills beset thee, I am not ashamed to sail the sea of trouble at thy side.

ANTIGONE

Whose was the deed, Hades and the dead are witnesses: a friend in words is not the friend that I love.

ISMENE

Nay, sister, reject me not, but let me die with thee, and duly honour the dead.

ANTIGONE

Share not thou my death, nor claim deeds to which thou hast not put thy hand: my death will suffice.

ISMENE

And what life is dear to me, bereft of thee?

ANTIGONE

Ask Creon; all thy care is for him.

ISMENE

Why vex me thus, when it avails thee nought?

ANTIGONE

Indeed, if I mock, 'tis with pain that I mock thee.

ISMENE

Tell me,—how can I serve thee, even now?

ANTIGONE

Save thyself: I grudge not thy escape.

ISMENE

Ah, woe is me! And shall I have no share in thy fate?

ANTIGONE

Thy choice was to live; mine, to die.

ISMENE

At least thy choice was not made without my protest.

ANTIGONE

One world approved thy wisdom; another, mine.

ISMENE

Howbeit, the offence is the same for both of us.

ANTIGONE

Be of good cheer; thou livest; but my life hath long been given to death, that so I might serve the dead.

CREON

Lo, one of these maidens hath newly shown herself foolish, as the other hath been since her life began.

ISMENE

Yea, O king, such reason as nature may have given abides not with the unfortunate, but goes astray.

CREON

Thine did, when thou chosest vile deeds with the vile.

ISMENE

What life could I endure, without her presence?

CREON

Nay, speak not of her 'presence'; she lives no more.

ISMENE

But wilt thou slay the betrothed of thine own son?

CREON

Nay, there are other fields for him to plough.

ISMENE

But there can never be such love as bound him to her.

CREON

I like not an evil wife for my son.

ANTIGONE

Haemon, beloved! How thy father wrongs thee!

CREON

Enough, enough of thee and of thy marriage!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wilt thou indeed rob thy son of this maiden?

CREON

'Tis Death that shall stay these bridals for me.

LEADER

'Tis determined, it seems, that she shall die.

CREON

Determined, yes, for thee and for me.—(*To the two attendants*) No more delay—servants, take them within! Henceforth they must be women, and not range at large; for verily even the bold seek to fly, when they see Death now closing on their life.

(*Exeunt attendants, guarding* ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE.—CREON *remains.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Blest are they whose days have not tasted of evil. For when a house hath once been shaken from heaven, there the curse fails nevermore, passing from life to life of the race; even as, when the surge is driven over the darkness of the deep by the fierce breath of Thracian sea-winds, it rolls up the black sand from the depths, and there is a sullen roar from wind-vexed headlands that front the blows of the storm.

antistrophe 1

I see that from olden time the sorrows in the house of the Labdacidae are heaped upon the sorrows of the dead; and generation is

not freed by generation, but some god strikes them down, and the race hath no deliverance.

For now that hope of which the light had been spread above the last root of the house of Oedipus—that hope, in turn, is brought low —by the blood-stained dust due to the gods infernal, and by folly in speech, and frenzy at the heart.

strophe 2

Thy power, O Zeus, what human trespass can limit? That power which neither Sleep, the all-ensnaring, nor the untiring months of the gods can master; but thou, a ruler to whom time brings not old age, dwellest in the dazzling splendour of Olympus.

And through the future, near and far, as through the past, shall this law hold good: Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse.

antistrophe 2

For that hope whose wanderings are so wide is to many men a comfort, but to many a false lure of giddy desires; and the disappointment comes on one who knoweth nought till he burn his foot against the hot fire.

For with wisdom hath some one given forth the famous saying, that evil seems good, soon or late, to him whose mind the god draws to mischief; and but for the briefest space doth he fare free of woe.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But lo, Haemon, the last of thy sons;—comes he grieving for the doom of his promised bride, Antigone, and bitter for the baffled hope of his marriage?

(*Enter* HAEMON)

CREON

We shall know soon, better than seers could tell us.—My son, hearing the fixed doom of thy betrothed, art thou come in rage against thy father? Or have I thy good will, act how I may?

HAEMON

Father, I am thine; and thou, in thy wisdom, tracest for me rules which I shall follow. No marriage shall be deemed by me a greater gain than thy good guidance.

CREON

Yea, this, my son, should be thy heart's fixed law,—in all things to obey thy father's will. 'Tis for this that men pray to see dutiful children

grow up around them in their homes,—that such may requite their father's foe with evil, and honour, as their father doth, his friend. But he who begets unprofitable children—what shall we say that he hath sown, but troubles for himself, and much triumph for his foes? Then do not thou, my son, at pleasure's beck, dethrone thy reason for a woman's sake; knowing that this is a joy that soon grows cold in clasping arms,—an evil woman to share thy bed and thy home. For what wound could strike deeper than a false friend? Nay, with loathing, and as if she were thine enemy, let this girl go to find a husband in the house of Hades. For since I have taken her, alone of all the city, in open disobedience, I will not make myself a liar to my people—I will slay her.

So let her appeal as she will to the majesty of kindred blood. If I am to nurture mine own kindred in naughtiness, needs must I bear with it in aliens. He who does his duty in his own household will be found righteous in the State also. But if any one transgresses, and does violence to the laws, or thinks to dictate to his rulers, such an one can win no praise from me. No, whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed, in little things and great, in just things and unjust; and I should feel sure that one who thus obeys would be a good ruler no less than a good subject, and in the storm of spears would stand his ground where he was set, loyal and dauntless at his comrade's side.

But disobedience is the worst of evils. This it is that ruins cities; this makes homes desolate; by this, the ranks of allies are broken into headlong rout; but, of the lives whose course is fair, the greater part owes safety to obedience. Therefore we must support the cause of order, and in no wise suffer a woman to worst us. Better to fall from power, if we must, by a man's hand; then we should not be called weaker than a woman.

LEADER

To us, unless our years have stolen our wit, thou seemest to say wisely what thou sayest.

HAEMON

Father, the gods implant reason in men, the highest of all things that we call our own. Not mine the skill—far from me be the quest!—to say wherein thou speakest not aright; and yet another man, too, might have some useful thought. At least, it is my natural office to watch, on thy behalf, all that men say, or do, or find to blame. For the dread of thy frown forbids the citizen to speak such words as would offend thine ear; but I can hear these murmurs in the dark, these moanings of the city for this maiden; 'no woman,' they say, 'ever merited her doom less,—none ever was to die so shamefully for deeds so glorious as hers; who, when her own brother had fallen in bloody strife, would not leave him unburied, to be

devoured by carrion dogs, or by any bird:—deserves not *she* the meed of golden honour?'

Such is the darkling rumour that spreads in secret. For me, my father, no treasure is so precious as thy welfare. What, indeed, is a nobler ornament for children than a prospering sire's fair fame, or for sire than son's? Wear not, then, one mood only in thyself; think not that thy word, and thine alone, must be right. For if any man thinks that he alone is wise,—that in speech, or in mind, he hath no peer,—such a soul, when laid open, is ever found empty.

No, though a man be wise, 'tis no shame for him to learn many things, and to bend in season. Seest thou, beside the wintry torrent's course, how the trees that yield to it save every twig, while the stiff-necked perish root and branch? And even thus he who keeps the sheet of his sail taut, and never slackens it, upsets his boat, and finishes his voyage with keel uppermost.

Nay, forego thy wrath; permit thyself to change. For if I, a younger man, may offer my thought, it were far best, I ween, that men should be all-wise by nature; but, otherwise—and oft the scale inclines not so—'tis good also to learn from those who speak aright.

LEADER

Sire, 'tis meet that thou shouldest profit by his words, if he speaks aught in season, and thou, Haemon, by thy father's; for on both parts there hath been wise speech.

CREON

Men of my age—are we indeed to be schooled, then, by men of his?

HAEMON

In nothing that is not right; but if I am young, thou shouldest look to my merits, not to my years.

CREON

Is it a merit to honour the unruly?

HAEMON

I could wish no one to show respect for evil-doers.

CREON

Then is not she tainted with that malady?

HAEMON

Our Theban folk, with one voice, denies it.

CREON

Shall Thebes prescribe to me how I must rule?

HAEMON
See, there thou hast spoken like a youth indeed.

CREON
Am I to rule this land by other judgment than mine own?

HAEMON
That is no city which belongs to one man.

CREON
Is not the city held to be the ruler's?

HAEMON
Thou wouldst make a good monarch of a desert.

CREON
This boy, it seems, is the woman's champion.

HAEMON
If thou art a woman; indeed, my care is for thee.

CREON
Shameless, at open feud with thy father!

HAEMON
Nay, I see thee offending against justice.

CREON
Do I offend, when I respect mine own prerogatives?

HAEMON
Thou dost not respect them, when thou tramplest on the gods' honours.

CREON
O dastard nature, yielding place to woman!

HAEMON
Thou wilt never find me yield to baseness.

CREON
All thy words, at least, plead for that girl.

HAEMON
And for thee, and for me, and for the gods below.

CREON
Thou canst never marry her, on this side the grave.

HAEMON

Then she must die, and in death destroy another.

CREON

How! doth thy boldness run to open threats?

HAEMON

What threat is it, to combat vain resolves?

CREON

Thou shalt rue thy witless teaching of wisdom.

HAEMON

Wert thou not my father, I would have called thee unwise.

CREON

Thou woman's slave, use not wheedling speech with me.

HAEMON

Thou wouldest speak, and then hear no reply?

CREON

Sayest thou so? Now, by the heaven above us—be sure of it—thou shalt smart for taunting me in this opprobrious strain. Bring forth that hated thing, that she may die forthwith in his presence—before his eyes—at her bridegroom's side!

HAEMON

No, not at my side—never think it—shall she perish; nor shalt thou ever set eyes more upon my face:—rave, then, with such friends as can endure thee.

(*Exit* HAEMON)

LEADER

The man is gone, O king, in angry haste; a youthful mind, when stung, is fierce.

CREON

Let him do, or dream, more than man—good speed to him!—But he shall not save these two girls from their doom.

LEADER

Dost thou indeed purpose to slay both?

CREON

Not her whose hands are pure: thou sayest well.

LEADER

And by what doom mean'st thou to slay the other?

CREON

I will take her where the path is loneliest, and hide her, living, in a rocky vault, with so much food set forth as piety prescribes, that the city may avoid a public stain. And there, praying to Hades, the only god whom she worships, perchance she will obtain release from death; or else will learn, at last, though late, that it is lost labour to revere the dead.

(CREON *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Love, unconquered in the fight, Love, who makest havoc of wealth, who keepest thy vigil on the soft cheek of a maiden; thou roamest over the sea, and among the homes of dwellers in the wilds; no immortal can escape thee, nor any among men whose life is for a day; and he to whom thou hast come is mad.

antistrophe

The just themselves have their minds warped by thee to wrong, for their ruin: 'tis thou that hast stirred up this present strife of kinsmen; victorious is the love-kindling light from the eyes of the fair bride; it is a power enthroned in sway beside the eternal laws; for there the goddess Aphrodite is working her unconquerable will.

(ANTIGONE *is led out of the palace by two of* CREON'S *attendants who are about to conduct her to her doom.*)

But now I also am carried beyond the bounds of loyalty, and can no more keep back the streaming tears, when I see Antigone thus passing to the bridal chamber where all are laid to rest.

(*The following lines between* ANTIGONE *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

ANTIGONE

strophe 1

See me, citizens of my fatherland, setting forth on my last way, looking my last on the sunlight that is for me no more; no, Hades who gives sleep to all leads me living to Acheron's shore; who have had no portion in the chant that brings the bride, nor hath any song been mine for the crowning of bridals; whom the lord of the Dark Lake shall wed.

CHORUS

systema 1

Glorious, therefore, and with praise, thou departest to that deep place of the dead: wasting sickness hath not smitten thee; thou hast not found the wages of the sword; no, mistress of thine own fate, and still alive, thou shalt pass to Hades, as no other of mortal kind hath passed.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 1

I have heard in other days how dread a doom befell our Phrygian guest, the daughter of Tantalus, on the Sipylian heights;[1] how, like clinging ivy, the growth of stone subdued her; and the rains fail not, as men tell, from her wasting form, nor fails the snow, while beneath her weeping lids the tears bedew her bosom; and most like to hers is the fate that brings me to my rest.

CHORUS

systema 2

Yet she was a goddess, thou knowest, and born of gods; we are mortals, and of mortal race. But 'tis great renown for a woman who hath perished that she should have shared the doom of the godlike, in her life, and afterward in death.

ANTIGONE

strophe 2

Ah, I am mocked! In the name of our fathers' gods, can ye not wait till I am gone,—must ye taunt me to my face, O my city, and ye, her wealthy sons? Ah, fount of Dirce, and thou holy ground of Thebe whose chariots are many; ye, at least, will bear me witness, in what sort, unwept of friends, and by what laws I pass to the rock-closed prison of my strange tomb, ah me unhappy! who have no home on the earth or in the shades, no home with the living or with the dead.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Thou hast rushed forward to the utmost verge of daring; and against that throne where Justice sits on high thou hast fallen, my daughter, with a grievous fall. But in this ordeal thou art paying, haply, for thy father's sin.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 2

Thou hast touched on my bitterest thought,—awaking the ever-new lament for my sire and for all the doom given to us, the famed

house of Labdacus. Alas for the horrors of the mother's bed! alas for the wretched mother's slumber at the side of her own son,—and my sire! From what manner of parents did I take my miserable being! And to them I go thus, accursed, unwed, to share their home. Alas, my brother, ill-starred in thy marriage, in thy death thou hast undone my life!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Reverent action claims a certain praise for reverence; but an offence against power cannot be brooked by him who hath power in his keeping. Thy self-willed temper hath wrought thy ruin.

ANTIGONE

epode

Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led forth in my sorrow on this journey that can be delayed no more. No longer, hapless one, may I behold yon day-star's sacred eye; but for my fate no tear is shed, no friend makes moan.

(CREON *enters from the palace.*)

CREON

Know ye not that songs and wailings before death would never cease, if it profited to utter them? Away with her—away! And when ye have enclosed her, according to my word, in her vaulted grave, leave her alone, forlorn—whether she wishes to die, or to live a buried life in such a home. Our hands are clean as touching this maiden. But this is certain—she shall be deprived of her sojourn in the light.

ANTIGONE

Tomb, bridal-chamber, eternal prison in the caverned rock, whither I go to find mine own, those many who have perished, and whom Persephone hath received among the dead! Last of all shall I pass thither, and far most miserably of all, before the term of my life is spent. But I cherish good hope that my coming will be welcome to my father, and pleasant to thee, my mother, and welcome, brother, to thee; for, when ye died, with mine own hands I washed and dressed you, and poured drink-offerings at your graves; and now, Polyneices, 'tis for tending thy corpse that I win such recompense as this.

And yet I honoured thee, as the wise will deem, rightly. Never, had I been a mother of children, or if a husband had been mouldering in death, would I have taken this task upon me in the city's despite. What law, ye ask, is my warrant for that word? The husband lost, another might have been found, and child from another, to replace the first-born; but, father

and mother hidden with Hades, no brother's life could ever bloom for me again. Such was the law whereby I held thee first in honour; but Creon deemed me guilty of error therein, and of outrage, ah brother mine! And now he leads me thus, a captive in his hands; no bridal bed, no bridal song hath been mine, no joy of marriage, no portion in the nurture of children; but thus, forlorn of friends, unhappy one, I go living to the vaults of death.[2]

And what law of heaven have I transgressed? Why, hapless one, should I look to the gods any more,—what ally should I invoke,—when by piety I have earned the name of impious? Nay, then, if these things are pleasing to the gods, when I have suffered my doom, I shall come to know my sin: but if the sin is with my judges, I could wish them no fuller measure of evil than they, on their part, mete wrongfully to me.

CHORUS

Still the same tempest of the soul vexes this maiden with the same fierce gusts.

CREON

Then for this shall her guards have cause to rue their slowness.

ANTIGONE

Ah me! that word hath come very near to death.

CREON

I can cheer thee with no hope that this doom is not thus to be fulfilled.

ANTIGONE

O city of my fathers in the land of Thebe! O ye gods, eldest of our race!—they lead me hence—now, now—they tarry not! Behold me, princes of Thebes, the last daughter of the house of your kings,—see what I suffer, and from whom, because I feared to cast away the fear of Heaven!

(ANTIGONE *is led away by the guards.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Even thus endured Danae in her beauty to change the light of day for brass-bound walls; and in that chamber, secret as the grave, she was held close prisoner; yet was she of a proud lineage, O my daughter, and charged with the keeping of the seed of Zeus, that fell in the golden rain.

But dreadful is the mysterious power of fate; there is no deliver-

ance from it by wealth or by war, by fenced city, or dark, sea-beaten ships.

antistrophe 1

And bonds tamed the son of Dryas, swift to wrath, that king of the Edonians; so paid he for his frenzied taunts, when, by the will of Dionysus, he was pent in a rocky prison. There the fierce exuberance of his madness slowly passed away. That man learned to know the god, whom in his frenzy he had provoked with mockeries; for he had sought to quell the god-possessed women, and the Bacchanalian fire; and he angered the Muses that love the flute.

strophe 2

And by the waters of the Dark Rocks, the waters of the twofold sea, are the shores of Bosporus, and Thracian Salmydessus; where Ares, neighbour to the city, saw the accurst, blinding wound dealt to the two sons of Phineus by his fierce wife,—the wound that brought darkness to those vengeance-craving orbs, smitten with her bloody hands, smitten with her shuttle for a dagger.

antistrophe 2

Pining in their misery, they bewailed their cruel doom, those sons of a mother hapless in her marriage; but she traced her descent from the ancient line of the Erechtheidae; and in far-distant caves she was nursed amid her father's storms, that child of Boreas, swift as a steed over the steep hills, a daughter of gods; yet upon her also the gray Fates bore hard, my daughter.

(*Enter* TEIRESIAS, *led by a Boy, on the spectators' right.*)

TEIRESIAS

Princes of Thebes, we have come with linked steps, both served by the eyes of one; for thus, by a guide's help, the blind must walk.

CREON

And what, aged Teiresias, are thy tidings?

TEIRESIAS

I will tell thee; and do thou hearken to the seer.

CREON

Indeed, it has not been my wont to slight thy counsel.

TEIRESIAS

Therefore didst thou steer our city's course aright.

CREON

I have felt, and can attest, thy benefits.

TEIRESIAS

Mark that now, once more, thou standest on fate's fine edge.

CREON

What means this? How I shudder at thy message!

TEIRESIAS

Thou wilt learn, when thou hearest the warnings of mine art. As I took my place on mine old seat of augury, where all birds have been wont to gather within my ken, I heard a strange voice among them; they were screaming with dire, feverish rage, that drowned their language in a jargon; and I knew that they were rending each other with their talons, murderously; the whirr of wings told no doubtful tale.

Forthwith, in fear, I essayed burnt-sacrifice on a duly kindled altar: but from my offerings the Fire-god showed no flame; a dank moisture, oozing from the thigh-flesh, trickled forth upon the embers, and smoked, and sputtered; the gall was scattered to the air; and the streaming thighs lay bared of the fat that had been wrapped round them.

Such was the failure of the rites by which I vainly asked a sign, as from this boy I learned; for he is my guide, as I am guide to others. And 'tis thy counsel that hath brought this sickness on our State. For the altars of our city and of our hearths have been tainted, one and all, by birds and dogs, with carrion from the hapless corpse, the son of Oedipus: and therefore the gods no more accept prayer and sacrifice at our hands, or the flame of meat-offering; nor doth any bird give a clear sign by its shrill cry, for they have tasted the fatness of a slain man's blood.

Think, then, on these things, my son. All men are liable to err; but when an error hath been made, that man is no longer witless or unblest who heals the ill into which he hath fallen, and remains not stubborn.

Self-will, we know, incurs the charge of folly. Nay, allow the claim of the dead; stab not the fallen; what prowess is it to slay the slain anew? I have sought thy good, and for thy good I speak: and never is it sweeter to learn from a good counsellor than when he counsels for thine own gain.

CREON

Old man, ye all shoot your shafts at me, as archers at the butts;—ye must needs practise on me with seer-craft also;—aye, the seer-tribe hath long trafficked in me, and made me their merchandise. Gain your gains, drive your trade, if ye list, in the silver-gold of Sardis and the gold of India; but ye shall not hide that man in the grave,—no, though the eagles of Zeus should bear the carrion morsels to their Master's throne—no, not

for dread of that defilement will I suffer his burial:—for well I know that no mortal can defile the gods.—But, aged Teiresias, the wisest fall with a shameful fall, when they clothe shameful thoughts in fair words, for lucre's sake.

TEIRESIAS

Alas! Doth any man know, doth any consider . . .

CREON

Whereof? What general truth dost thou announce?

TEIRESIAS

How precious, above all wealth, is good counsel.

CREON

As folly, I think, is the worst mischief.

TEIRESIAS

Yet thou art tainted with that distemper.

CREON

I would not answer the seer with a taunt.

TEIRESIAS

But thou dost, in saying that I prophesy falsely.

CREON

Well, the prophet-tribe was ever fond of money.

TEIRESIAS

And the race bred of tyrants loves base gain.

CREON

Knowest thou that thy speech is spoken of thy king?

TEIRESIAS

I know it; for through me thou hast saved Thebes.

CREON

Thou art a wise seer; but thou lovest evil deeds.

TEIRESIAS

Thou wilt rouse me to utter the dread secret in my soul.

CREON

Out with it!—Only speak it not for gain.

TEIRESIAS

Indeed, methinks, I shall not,—as touching thee.

CREON

Know that thou shalt not trade on my resolve.

TEIRESIAS

Then know thou—aye, know it well—that thou shalt not live through many more courses of the sun's swift chariot, ere one begotten of thine own loins shall have been given by thee, a corpse for corpses; because thou hast thrust children of the sunlight to the shades, and ruthlessly lodged a living soul in the grave; but keepest in this world one who belongs to the gods infernal, a corpse unburied, unhonoured, all unhallowed. In such thou hast no part, nor have the gods above, but this is a violence done to them by thee. Therefore the avenging destroyers lie in wait for thee, the Furies of Hades and of the gods, that thou mayest be taken in these same ills.

And mark well if I speak these things as a hireling. A time not long to be delayed shall awaken the wailing of men and of women in thy house. And a tumult of hatred against thee stirs all the cities whose mangled sons had the burial-rite from dogs, or from wild beasts, or from some winged bird that bore a polluting breath to each city that contains the hearths of the dead.

Such arrows for thy heart—since thou provokest me—have I launched at thee, archer-like, in my anger,—sure arrows, of which thou shalt not escape the smart.—Boy, lead me home, that he may spend his rage on younger men, and learn to keep a tongue more temperate, and to bear within his breast a better mind than now he bears.

(*The Boy leads* TEIRESIAS *out.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The man hath gone, O King, with dread prophecies. And, since the hair on this head, once dark, hath been white, I know that he hath never been a false prophet to our city.

CREON

I, too, know it well, and am troubled in soul. 'Tis dire to yield; but, by resistance, to smite my pride with ruin—this, too, is a dire choice.

LEADER

Son of Menoeceus, it behoves thee to take wise counsel.

CREON

What should I do, then? Speak, and I will obey.

LEADER

Go thou, and free the maiden from her rocky chamber, and make a tomb for the unburied dead.

CREON

And this is thy counsel? Thou wouldst have me yield?

LEADER

Yea, King, and with all speed; for swift harms from the gods cut short the folly of men.

CREON

Ah me, 'tis hard, but I resign my cherished resolve,—I obey. We must not wage a vain war with destiny.

LEADER

Go, thou, and do these things; leave them not to others.

CREON

Even as I am I'll go:—on, on, my servants, each and all of you,—take axes in your hands, and hasten to the ground that ye see yonder! Since our judgment hath taken this turn, I will be present to unloose her, as I myself bound her. My heart misgives me, 'tis best to keep the established laws, even to life's end.

(CREON *and his servants hasten out on the spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O thou of many names, glory of the Cadmeian bride, offspring of loud-thundering Zeus! thou who watchest over famed Italia, and reignest, where all guests are welcomed, in the sheltered plain of Eleusinian Deo! O Bacchus, dweller in Thebe, mother-city of Bacchants, by the softly-gliding stream of Ismenus, on the soil where the fierce dragon's teeth were sown!

antistrophe 1

Thou hast been seen where torch-flames glare through smoke, above the crests of the twin peaks, where move the Corycian nymphs, thy votaries, hard by Castalia's stream.

Thou comest from the ivy-mantled slopes of Nysa's hills, and from the shore green with many-clustered vines, while thy name is lifted up on strains of more than mortal power, as thou visitest the ways of Thebe:

strophe 2

Thebe, of all cities, thou holdest first in honour, thou, and thy mother whom the lightning smote; and now, when all our people is captive to a violent plague, come thou with healing feet over the Parnassian height, or over the moaning strait!

antistrophe 2

O thou with whom the stars rejoice as they move, the stars whose breath is fire; O master of the voices of the night; son begotten of Zeus; appear, O king, with thine attendant Thyiads, who in night-long frenzy dance before thee, the giver of good gifts, Iacchus!

(*Enter* MESSENGER, *on the spectators' left.*)

MESSENGER

Dwellers by the house of Cadmus and of Amphion, there is no estate of mortal life that I would ever praise or blame as settled. Fortune raises and Fortune humbles the lucky or unlucky from day to day, and no one can prophesy to men concerning those things which are established. For Creon was blest once, as I count bliss; he had saved this land of Cadmus from its foes; he was clothed with sole dominion in the land; he reigned, the glorious sire of princely children. And now all hath been lost. For when a man hath forfeited his pleasures, I count him not as living,—I hold him but a breathing corpse. Heap up riches in thy house, if thou wilt; live in kingly state; yet, if there be no gladness therewith, I would not give the shadow of a vapour for all the rest, compared with joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what is this new grief that thou hast to tell for our princes?

MESSENGER

Death; and the living are guilty for the dead.

LEADER

And who is the slayer? Who the stricken? Speak.

MESSENGER

Haemon hath perished; his blood hath been shed by no stranger.

LEADER

By his father's hand, or by his own?

MESSENGER

By his own, in wrath with his sire for the murder.

LEADER

O prophet, how true, then, hast thou proved thy word!

MESSENGER

These things stand thus; ye must consider of the rest.

LEADER

Lo, I see the hapless Eurydice, Creon's wife, approaching; she comes from the house by chance, haply,—or because she knows the tidings of her son.

(*Enter* EURYDICE *from the palace.*)

EURYDICE

People of Thebes, I heard your words as I was going forth, to salute the goddess Pallas with my prayers. Even as I was loosing the fastenings of the gate, to open it, the message of a household woe smote on mine ear: I sank back, terror-stricken, into the arms of my handmaids, and my senses fled. But say again what the tidings were; I shall hear them as one who is no stranger to sorrow.

MESSENGER

Dear lady, I will witness of what I saw, and will leave no word of the truth untold. Why, indeed, should I soothe thee with words in which I must presently be found false? Truth is ever best.—I attended thy lord as his guide to the furthest part of the plain, where the body of Polyneices, torn by dogs, still lay unpitied. We prayed the goddess of the roads, and Pluto, in mercy to restrain their wrath; we washed the dead with holy washing; and with freshly-plucked boughs we solemnly burned such relics as there were. We raised a high mound of his native earth; and then we turned away to enter the maiden's nuptial chamber with rocky couch, the caverned mansion of the bride of Death. And, from afar off, one of us heard a voice of loud wailing at that bride's unhallowed bower; and came to tell our master Creon.

And as the king drew nearer, doubtful sounds of a bitter cry floated around him; he groaned, and said in accents of anguish, 'Wretched that I am, can my foreboding be true? Am I going on the wofullest way that ever I went? My son's voice greets me.—Go, my servants,—haste ye nearer, and when ye have reached the tomb, pass through the gap, where the stones have been wrenched away, to the cell's very mouth,—and look, and see if 'tis Haemon's voice that I know, or if mine ear is cheated by the gods.'

This search, at our despairing master's word, we went to make; and in the furthest part of the tomb we descried *her* hanging by the neck, slung by a thread-wrought halter of fine linen; while *he* was embracing

her with arms thrown around her waist,—bewailing the loss of his bride who is with the dead, and his father's deeds, and his own ill-starred love.

But his father, when he saw him, cried aloud with a dread cry and went in, and called to him with a voice of wailing:—'Unhappy, what a deed hast thou done! What thought hath come to thee? What manner of mischance hath marred thy reason? Come forth, my child! I pray thee —I implore!' But the boy glared at him with fierce eyes, spat in his face, and, without a word of answer, drew his cross-hilted sword:—as his father rushed forth in flight, he missed his aim;—then, hapless one, wroth with himself, he straightway leaned with all his weight against his sword, and drove it, half its length, into his side; and, while sense lingered, he clasped the maiden to his faint embrace, and, as he gasped, sent forth on her pale cheek the swift stream of the oozing blood.

Corpse enfolding corpse he lies; he hath won his nuptial rites, poor youth, not here, yet in the halls of Death; and he hath witnessed to mankind that, of all curses which cleave to man, ill counsel is the sovereign curse.

(EURYDICE *retires into the house.*)

LEADER

What wouldst thou augur from this? The lady hath turned back, and is gone, without a word, good or evil.

MESSENGER

I, too, am startled; yet I nourish the hope that, at these sore tidings of her son, she cannot deign to give her sorrow public vent, but in the privacy of the house will set her handmaids to mourn the household grief. For she is not untaught of discretion, that she should err.

LEADER

I know not; but to me, at least, a strained silence seems to portend peril, no less than vain abundance of lament.

MESSENGER

Well, I will enter the house, and learn whether indeed she is not hiding some repressed purpose in the depths of a passionate heart. Yea, thou sayest well: excess of silence, too, may have a perilous meaning.

(*The* MESSENGER *goes into the palace. Enter* CREON, *on the spectators' left, with attendants, carrying the shrouded body of* HAEMON *on a bier. The following lines between* CREON *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Lo, yonder the king himself draws near, bearing that which tells too clear a tale,—the work of no stranger's madness,—if we may say it,—but of his own misdeeds.

CREON

strophe 1

Woe for the sins of a darkened soul, stubborn sins, fraught with death! Ah, ye behold us, the sire who hath slain, the son who hath perished! Woe is me, for the wretched blindness of my counsels! Alas, my son, thou hast died in thy youth, by a timeless doom, woe is me!—thy spirit hath fled,—not by thy folly, but by mine own!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Ah me, how all too late thou seemest to see the right!

CREON

Ah me, I have learned the bitter lesson! But then, methinks, oh then, some god smote me from above with crushing weight, and hurled me into ways of cruelty, woe is me,—overthrowing and trampling on my joy! Woe, woe, for the troublous toils of men!

(*Enter* MESSENGER *from the house.*)

MESSENGER

Sire, thou hast come, methinks, as one whose hands are not empty, but who hath store laid up besides; thou bearest yonder burden with thee; and thou art soon to look upon the woes within thy house.

CREON

And what worse ill is yet to follow upon ills?

MESSENGER

Thy queen hath died, true mother of yon corpse—ah, hapless lady!—by blows newly dealt.

CREON

antistrophe 1

Oh Hades, all-receiving, whom no sacrifice can appease! Hast thou, then, no mercy for me? O thou herald of evil, bitter tidings, what word dost thou utter? Alas, I was already as dead, and thou hast smitten me anew! What sayest thou, my son? What is this new message that thou bringest—woe, woe is me!—of a wife's doom,—of slaughter heaped on slaughter?

CHORUS

Thou canst behold: 'tis no longer hidden within.

(*The doors of the palace are opened, and the corpse of* EURYDICE *is disclosed.*)

CREON

antistrophe 2

Ah me,—yonder I behold a new, a second woe! What destiny, ah what, can yet await me? I have but now raised my son in my arms, —and there, again, I see a corpse before me! Alas, alas, unhappy mother! Alas, my child!

MESSENGER

There, at the altar, self-stabbed with a keen knife, she suffered her darkening eyes to close, when she had wailed for the noble fate of Megareus [3] who died before, and then for his fate who lies there,—and when, with her last breath, she had invoked evil fortunes upon thee, the slayer of thy sons.

CREON

strophe 3

Woe, woe! I thrill with dread. Is there none to strike me to the heart with two-edged sword?—O miserable that I am, and steeped in miserable anguish!

MESSENGER

Yea, both this son's doom, and that other's, were laid to thy charge by her whose corpse thou seest.

CREON

And what was the manner of the violent deed by which she passed away?

MESSENGER

Her own hand struck her to the heart, when she had learned her son's sorely lamented fate.

CREON

strophe 4

Ah me, this guilt can never be fixed on any other of mortal kind, for my acquittal! I, even I, was thy slayer, wretched that I am—I own the truth. Lead me away, O my servants, lead me hence with all speed, whose life is but as death!

CHORUS

Thy counsels are good, if there can be good with ills; briefest is best, when trouble is in our path.

CREON

antistrophe 3

Oh, let it come, let it appear, that fairest of fates for me, that brings my last day,—aye, best fate of all! Oh, let it come, that I may never look upon to-morrow's light.

CHORUS

These things are in the future; present tasks claim our care: the ordering of the future rests where it should rest.

CREON

All my desires, at least, were summed in that prayer.

CHORUS

Pray thou no more; for mortals have no escape from destined woe.

CREON

antistrophe 4

Lead me away, I pray you; a rash, foolish man; who have slain thee, ah my son, unwittingly, and thee, too, my wife—unhappy that I am! I know not which way I should bend my gaze, or where I should seek support; for all is amiss with that which is in my hands,—and yonder, again, a crushing fate hath leapt upon my head.

(*As* CREON *is being conducted into the palace, the* LEADER OF THE CHORUS *speaks the closing verses.*)

LEADER

Wisdom is the supreme part of happiness; and reverence towards the gods must be inviolate. Great words of prideful men are ever punished with great blows, and, in old age, teach the chastened to be wise.

1. Antigone is referring to the story of Niobe.

2. Lines 904–920, rendered in this paragraph, are rejected as spurious by Jebb.

3. Megareus, the other son of Creon, was one of the Theban champions who defended a gate of the city, in Aeschylus' *The Seven Against Thebes*. Euripides, in *The Phoenissae* calls him Menoeceus and presents a version of his death.

IV
THE TRACHINIAE

Characters in the Play

Deianeira
Nurse
Hyllus, *son of* Heracles *and* Deianeira
Messenger
Lichas, *the herald of* Heracles
Heracles
An Old Man
Chorus of Trachinian Maidens

INTRODUCTION

THE TRACHINIAE is presumably a later work of Sophocles, but there is no means of determining its exact date. The theory that it is a later composition of the poet rests upon the fact that it bears the unmistakable marks of Euripidean influence. The Chorus is much less integral to the play than is normal in Sophocles. The odes in general serve merely as lyrical interludes between the several episodes of the tragedy. Likewise, there is the motif of the poisoned robe, which naturally calls to mind its use in Euripides' *Medea*. Furthermore, Deianeira's opening speech is almost a perfect example of a conventional Euripidean prologue. Because of these and other reasons, *The Trachiniae* holds a position somewhat apart from Sophocles' other tragedies.

Myths of Heracles were always absorbing to the Greek audience, since hero-cults for his worship were widespread in the ancient world. The particular antecedents of Sophocles' plot in *The Trachiniae*, which derive from the legends of Heracles, begin with the story of his marriage to Deianeira, whom he rescued from the wooing of the river-god, Achelous. After he had taken his bride away, the newly married couple came to a river across which the centaur, Nessus, carried travellers. While Nessus was transporting Deianeira over the river, he attempted to lay violent hands upon her, whereupon Heracles in anger shot him with one of his poisoned arrows. As Nessus was dying he told Deianeira to take some of the blood which was clotted round his wound, and use it as a charm to win back the love of Heracles if ever he should prove unfaithful to her. Later, after Heracles had completed his labours for Eurystheus, he and his family were banished to Trachis because he had treacherously slain a man. Heracles was further punished by Zeus, for he was made to serve a year under Omphale, the queen of Lydia. *The Trachiniae* begins fifteen months after Heracles had departed for Lydia. Deianeira has had no word from her husband.

The play's power and effectiveness lie almost wholly in its portrayal of Deianeira. There are, to be sure, excellent delineations of the subordinate characters, such as Lichas and Hyllus, and several poetic passages of great lyric beauty. However, the closing scenes which present the suf-

ferings of the dying Heracles constitute a serious defect in the play. Despite the stoutest efforts of enthusiastic Sophoclean apologists, Heracles remains a brutal and self-centred character, for whom there can be little sympathy. Sophocles in the latter part of the play seems to have become so preoccupied with presenting Heracles' physical agony that he loses sight of Deianeira, his truly great tragic creation, and the artistic integrity of the whole piece is correspondingly impaired.

THE TRACHINIAE

(SCENE:—*At Trachis, before the house of* HERACLES. *Enter* DEIANEIRA *from the house, accompanied by the* NURSE.)

DEIANEIRA

THERE is a saying among men, put forth of old, that thou canst not rightly judge whether a mortal's lot is good or evil, ere he die. But I, even before I have passed to the world of death, know well that my life is sorrowful and bitter; I, who in the house of my father Oeneus, while yet I dwelt at Pleuron, had such fear of bridals as never vexed any maiden of Aetolia. For my wooer was a river-god, Achelous, who in three shapes was ever asking me from my sire,—coming now as a bull in bodily form, now as a serpent with sheeny coils, now with trunk of man and front of ox, while from a shaggy beard the streams of fountain-water flowed abroad. With the fear of such a suitor before mine eyes, I was always praying in my wretchedness that I might die, or ever I should come near to such a bed.

But at last, to my joy, came the glorious son of Zeus and Alcmena; who closed with him in combat, and delivered me. How the fight was waged, I cannot clearly tell, I know not; if there be any one who watched that sight without terror, such might speak: I, as I sat there, was distraught with dread, lest beauty should bring me sorrow at the last. But finally the Zeus of battles ordained well,—if well indeed it be: for since I have been joined to Heracles as his chosen bride, fear after fear hath haunted me on his account; one night brings a trouble, and the next night, in turn, drives it out. And then children were born to us; whom he has seen only as the husbandman sees his distant field, which he visits at seedtime, and once again at harvest. Such was the life that kept him journeying to and fro, in the service of a certain master.

But now, when he hath risen above those trials,—now it is that my anguish is sorest. Ever since he slew the valiant Iphitus, we have been dwelling here in Trachis, exiles from our home, and the guests of a stranger; but where he is, no one knows; I only know that he is gone, and hath pierced my heart with cruel pangs for him. I am almost sure that some evil hath befallen him; it is no short space that hath passed, but

ten long months, and then five more,—and still no message from him. Yes, there has been some dread mischance;—witness that tablet which he left with me ere he went forth: oft do I pray to the gods that I may not have received it for my sorrow.

NURSE

Deianeira, my mistress, many a time have I marked thy bitter tears and lamentations, as thou bewailedst the going forth of Heracles; but now,—if it be meet to school the free-born with the counsels of a slave, and if I must say what behoves thee,—why, when thou art so rich in sons, dost thou send no one of them to seek thy lord;—Hyllus, before all, who might well go on that errand, if he cared that there should be tidings of his father's welfare? Lo! there he comes, speeding towards the house with timely step; if, then, thou deemest that I speak in season, thou canst use at once my counsel, and the man.

(HYLLUS *comes in from the side.*)

DEIANEIRA

My child, my son, wise words may fall, it seems, from humble lips; this woman is a slave, but hath spoken in the spirit of the free.

HYLLUS

How, mother? Tell me, if it may be told.

DEIANEIRA

It brings thee shame, she saith, that, when thy father hath been so long a stranger, thou hast not sought to learn where he is.

HYLLUS

Nay, I know,—if rumour can be trusted.

DEIANEIRA

And in what region, my child, doth rumour place him?

HYLLUS

Last year, they say, through all the months, he toiled as bondman to a Lydian woman.

DEIANEIRA

If he bore that, then no tidings can surprise.

HYLLUS

Well, he has been delivered from that, as I hear.

DEIANEIRA

Where, then, is he reported to be now,—alive, or dead?

HYLLUS

He is waging or planning a war, they say, upon Euboea, the realm of Eurytus.

DEIANEIRA

Knowest thou, my son, that he hath left with me sure oracles touching that land?

HYLLUS

What are they, mother? I know not whereof thou speakest.

DEIANEIRA

That either he shall meet his death, or, having achieved this task, shall have rest thenceforth, for all his days to come.

So, my child, when his fate is thus trembling in the scale, wilt thou not go to succour him? For we are saved, if he find safety, or we perish with him.

HYLLUS

Ay, I will go, my mother; and, had I known the import of these prophecies, I had been there long since; but, as it was, my father's wonted fortune suffered me not to feel fear for him, or to be anxious overmuch. Now that I have the knowledge, I will spare no pains to learn the whole truth in this matter.

DEIANEIRA

Go, then, my son; be the seeker ne'er so late, he is rewarded if he learn tidings of joy.

(HYLLUS *departs as the* CHORUS OF TRACHINIAN MAIDENS *enters. They are free-born young women of Trachis who are friends and confidantes of* DEIANEIRA. *She remains during their opening choral song.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Thou whom Night brings forth at the moment when she is despoiled of her starry crown, and lays to rest in thy splendour, tell me, I pray thee, O Sun-god, tell me where abides Alcmena's son? Thou glorious lord of flashing light, say, is he threading the straits of the sea, or hath he found an abode on either continent? Speak, thou who seest as none else can see!

antistrophe 1

For Deianeira, as I hear, hath ever an aching heart; she, the battle-prize of old, is now like some bird lorn of its mate; she can never lull her yearning, nor stay her tears; haunted by a sleepless fear for her

absent lord, she pines on her anxious, widowed couch, miserable in her foreboding of mischance.

strophe 2

As one may see billow after billow driven over the wide deep by the tireless south-wind or the north, so the trouble of his life, stormy

as the Cretan sea, now whirls back the son of Cadmus, now lifts him to honour. But some god ever saves him from the house of death, and suffers him not to fail.

antistrophe 2

Lady, I praise not this thy mood; with all reverence will I speak, yet in reproof. Thou dost not well, I say, to kill fair hope by fretting; remember that the son of Cronus himself, the all-disposing king, hath not appointed a painless lot for mortals. Sorrow and joy come round to all, as the Bear moves in his circling paths.

epode

Yea, starry night abides not with men, nor tribulation, nor wealth; in a moment it is gone from us, and another hath his turn of gladness, and of bereavement. So would I wish thee also, the Queen, to keep that prospect ever in thy thoughts; for when hath Zeus been found so careless of his children?

DEIANEIRA

Ye have heard of my trouble, I think, and that hath brought you here; but the anguish which consumes my heart—ye are strangers to that; and never may ye learn it by suffering! Yes, the tender plant grows in those sheltered regions of its own; and the Sun-god's heat vexes it not, nor rain, nor any wind; but it rejoices in its sweet, untroubled being, till such time as the maiden is called a wife, and finds her portion of anxious thoughts in the night, brooding on danger to husband or to children. Such an one could understand the burden of my cares; she could judge them by her own.

Well, I have had many a sorrow to weep for ere now; but I am going to speak of one more grievous than them all.

When Heracles my lord was going from home on his last journey, he left in the house an ancient tablet, inscribed with tokens which he had never brought himself to explain to me before, many as were the ordeals to which he had gone forth. He had always departed as if to conquer, not to die. But now, as if he were a doomed man, he told me what portion of his substance I was to take for my dower, and how he would have his sons share their father's land amongst them. And he fixed the time; say-

ing that, when a year and three months should have passed since he had left the country, then he was fated to die; or, if he should have survived that term, to live thenceforth an untroubled life.

Such, he said, was the doom ordained by the gods to be accomplished in the toils of Heracles; as the ancient oak at Dodona had spoken of yore, by the mouth of the two Peleiades. And this is the precise moment when the fulfilment of that word becomes due; so that I start up from sweet slumber, my friends, stricken with terror at the thought that I must remain widowed of the noblest among men.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hush—no more ill-omened words; I see a man approaching, who wears a wreath, as if for joyous tidings.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Queen Deianeira, I shall be the first of messengers to free thee from fear. Know that Alcmena's son lives and triumphs, and from battle brings the first-fruits to the gods of this land.

DEIANEIRA

What news is this, old man, that thou hast told me?

MESSENGER

That thy lord, admired of all, will soon come to thy house, restored to thee in his victorious might.

DEIANEIRA

What citizen or stranger hath told thee this?

MESSENGER

In the meadow, summer haunt of oxen, Lichas the herald is proclaiming it to many: from him I heard it, and flew hither, that I might be the first to give thee these tidings, and so might reap some guerdon from thee, and win thy grace.

DEIANEIRA

And why is *he* not here, if he brings good news?

MESSENGER

His task, lady, is no easy one; all the Malian folk have thronged around him with questions, and he cannot move forward: each and all are bent on learning what they desire, and will not release him until they are satisfied. Thus their eagerness detains him against his will; but thou shalt presently see him face to face.

DEIANEIRA

O Zeus, who rulest the meads of Oeta, sacred from the scythe, at last, though late, thou hast given us joy! Uplift your voices, ye women within the house and ye beyond our gates, since now we are gladdened by the light of this message, that hath risen on us beyond my hope!

LEADER OF ONE SEMI-CHORUS (*singing*)

Let the maidens raise a joyous strain for the house, with songs of triumph at the hearth; and, amidst them, let the shout of the men go up with one accord for Apollo of the bright quiver, our Defender! And at the same time, ye maidens, lift up a paean, cry aloud to his sister, the Ortygian Artemis, smiter of deer, goddess of the twofold torch, and to the Nymphs her neighbours!

LEADER OF OTHER SEMI-CHORUS

My spirit soars; I will not reject the wooing of the flute.—O thou sovereign of my soul! Lo, the ivy's spell begins to work upon me! Euoe!—even now it moves me to whirl in the swift dance of Bachanals!

CHORUS

Praise, praise unto the Healer!

LEADER OF WHOLE CHORUS

See, dear lady, see! Behold, these tidings are taking shape before thy gaze.

DEIANEIRA

I see it, dear maidens; my watching eyes had not failed to note yon company. (*Enter* LICHAS, *followed by Captive Maidens. Conspicuous among them is* IOLE.)—All hail to the herald, whose coming hath been so long delayed!—if indeed thou bringest aught that can give joy.

LICHAS

We are happy in our return, and happy in thy greeting, lady, which befits the deed achieved; for when a man hath fair fortune, he needs must win good welcome.

DEIANEIRA

O best of friends, tell me first what first I would know,—shall I receive Heracles alive?

LICHAS

I, certainly, left him alive and well,—in vigorous health, unburdened by disease.

DEIANEIRA

Where, tell me—at home, or on foreign soil?

LICHAS

There is a headland of Euboea, where to Cenaean Zeus he consecrates altars, and the tribute of fruitful ground.

DEIANEIRA

In payment of a vow, or at the bidding of an oracle?

LICHAS

For a vow, made when he was seeking to conquer and despoil the country of these women who are before thee.

DEIANEIRA

And these—who are they, I pray thee, and whose daughters? They deserve pity, unless their plight deceives me.

LICHAS

These are captives whom he chose out for himself and for the gods, when he sacked the city of Eurytus.

DEIANEIRA

Was it the war against that city which kept him away so long, beyond all forecast, past all count of days?

LICHAS

Not so: the greater part of the time he was detained in Lydia,—no free man, as he declares, but sold into bondage. No offence should attend on the word, lady, when the deed is found to be of Zeus. So he passed a whole year, as he himself avows, in thraldom to Omphale the barbarian. And so stung was he by that reproach, he bound himself by a solemn oath that he would one day enslave, with wife and child, the man who had brought that calamity upon him. Nor did he speak the word in vain; but, when he had been purged, gathered an alien host, and went against the city of Eurytus. That man, he said, alone of mortals, had a share in causing his misfortune. For when Heracles, an old friend, came to his house and hearth, Eurytus heaped on him the taunts of a bitter tongue and spiteful soul,—saying, 'Thou hast unerring arrows in thy hands, and yet my sons surpass thee in the trial of archery'; 'Thou art a slave,' he cried, 'a free man's broken thrall': and at a banquet, when his guest was full of wine, he thrust him from his doors.

Wroth thereat, when afterward Iphitus came to the hill of Tiryns, in search for horses that had strayed, Heracles seized a moment when the man's wandering thoughts went not with his wandering gaze, and hurled

him from a tower-like summit. But in anger at that deed, Zeus our lord, Olympian sire of all, sent him forth into bondage, and spared not, because, this once, he had taken a life by guile. Had he wreaked his vengeance openly, Zeus would surely have pardoned him the righteous triumph; for the gods, too, love not insolence.

So those men, who waxed so proud with bitter speech, are themselves in the mansions of the dead, all of them, and their city is enslaved; while the women whom thou beholdest, fallen from happiness to misery, come here to thee; for such was thy lord's command, which I, his faithful servant, perform. He himself, thou mayest be sure,—so soon as he shall have offered holy sacrifice for his victory to Zeus from whom he sprang,—will be with thee. After all the fair tidings that have been told, this, indeed, is the sweetest word to hear.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Now, O Queen, thy joy is assured; part is with thee, and thou hast promise of the rest.

DEIANEIRA

Yea, have I not the fullest reason to rejoice at these tidings of my lord's happy fortune? To such fortune, such joy must needs respond. And yet a prudent mind can see room for misgiving lest he who prospers should one day suffer reverse. A strange pity hath come over me, friends, at the sight of these ill-fated exiles, homeless and fatherless in a foreign land; once the daughters, perchance, of free-born sires, but now doomed to the life of slaves. O Zeus, who turnest the tide of battle, never may I see child of mine thus visited by thy hand; nay, if such visitation is to be, may it not fall while Deianeira lives! Such dread do I feel, beholding these.

(*To* IOLE) Ah, hapless girl, say, who art thou? A maiden, or a mother? To judge by thine aspect, an innocent maiden, and of a noble race. Lichas, whose daughter is this stranger? Who is her mother, who her sire? Speak, I pity her more than all the rest, when I behold her; as she alone shows a due feeling for her plight.

LICHAS

How should I know? Why should'st thou ask me? Perchance the offspring of not the meanest in yonder land.

DEIANEIRA

Can she be of royal race? Had Eurytus a daughter?

LICHAS

I know not; indeed, I asked not many questions.

DEIANEIRA

And thou hast not heard her name from any of her companions?

LICHAS

No, indeed, I went through my task in silence.

DEIANEIRA

Unhappy girl, let me, at least, hear it from thine own mouth. It is indeed distressing not to know *thy* name.

(IOLE *maintains her silence.*)

LICHAS

It will be unlike her former behaviour, then, I can tell thee, if she opens her lips: for she hath not uttered one word, but hath ever been travailing with the burden of her sorrow, and weeping bitterly, poor girl, since she left her wind-swept home. Such a state is grievous for herself, but claims our forbearance.

DEIANEIRA

Then let her be left in peace, and pass under our roof as she wishes; her present woes must not be crowned with fresh pains at my hands; she hath enough already.—Now let us all go in, that thou mayest start speedily on thy journey, while I make all things ready in the house.

(LICHAS *leads the captives into the house.* DEIANEIRA *starts to follow them, but the* MESSENGER, *who has been present during the entire scene, detains her. He speaks as he moves nearer to her.*)

MESSENGER

Ay, but first tarry here a brief space, that thou mayest learn, apart from yonder folk, whom thou art taking to thy hearth, and mayest gain the needful knowledge of things which have not been told to thee. Of these I am in full possession.

DEIANEIRA

What means this? Why wouldest thou stay my departure?

MESSENGER

Pause and listen. My former story was worth thy hearing, and so will this one be, methinks.

DEIANEIRA

Shall I call those others back? Or wilt thou speak before me and these maidens?

MESSENGER

To thee and these I can speak freely; never mind the others.

DEIANEIRA

Well, they are gone;—so thy story can proceed.

MESSENGER

Yonder man was not speaking the straight-forward truth in aught that he has just told. He has given false tidings now, or else his former report was dishonest.

DEIANEIRA

How sayest thou? Explain thy whole drift clearly; thus far, thy words are riddles to me.

MESSENGER

I heard this man declare, before many witnesses, that for this maiden's sake Heracles overthrew Eurytus and the proud towers of Oechalia; Love, alone of the gods, wrought on him to do those deeds of arms,—not the toilsome servitude to Omphale in Lydia, nor the death to which Iphitus was hurled. But now the herald has thrust Love out of sight, and tells a different tale.

Well, when he could not persuade her sire to give him the maiden for his paramour, he devised some petty complaint as a pretext, and made war upon her land,—that in which, as he said, this Eurytus bore sway,—and slew the prince her father, and sacked her city. And now, as thou seest, he comes sending her to this house not in careless fashion, lady, nor like a slave;—no, dream not of that,—it is not likely, if his heart is kindled with desire.

I resolved, therefore, O Queen, to tell thee all that I had heard from yonder man. Many others were listening to it, as I was, in the public place where the Trachinians were assembled; and they can convict him. If my words are unwelcome, I am grieved; but nevertheless I have spoken out the truth.

DEIANEIRA

Ah me unhappy! In what plight do I stand? What secret bane have I received beneath my roof? Hapless that I am! Is she nameless, then, as her convoy sware?

MESSENGER

Nay, illustrious by name as by birth; she is the daughter of Eurytus, and was once called Iole; she of whose parentage Lichas could say nothing, because, forsooth, he asked no questions.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Accursed, above other evil-doers, be the man whom deeds of treachery dishonour!

DEIANEIRA

Ah, maidens, what am I to do? These latest tidings have bewildered me!

LEADER

Go and inquire from Lichas; perchance he will tell the truth, if thou constrain him to answer.

DEIANEIRA

Well, I will go; thy counsel is not amiss.

MESSENGER

And I, shall I wait here? Or what is thy pleasure?

DEIANEIRA

Remain;—here he comes from the house of his own accord, without summons from me.

(*Enter* LICHAS)

LICHAS

Lady, what message shall I bear to Heracles? Give me thy commands, for, as thou seest, I am going.

DEIANEIRA

How hastily thou art rushing away, when thy visit had been so long delayed,—before we have had time for further talk.

LICHAS

Nay, if there be aught that thou would'st ask, I am at thy service.

DEIANEIRA

Wilt thou indeed give me the honest truth?

LICHAS

Yes, be great Zeus my witness,—in anything that I know.

DEIANEIRA

Who is the woman, then, whom thou hast brought?

LICHAS

She is Euboean; but of what birth, I cannot say.

MESSENGER

Sirrah, look at me:—to whom art thou speaking, think'st thou?

LICHAS

And thou—what dost thou mean by such a question?

MESSENGER

Deign to answer me, if thou comprehendest.

LICHAS

To the royal Deianeira, unless mine eyes deceive me,—daughter of Oeneus, wife of Heracles, and my queen.

MESSENGER

The very word that I wished to hear from thee:—thou sayest that she is thy queen?

LICHAS

Yes, as in duty bound.

MESSENGER

Well, then, what art thou prepared to suffer, if found guilty of failing in that duty?

LICHAS

Failing in duty? What dark saying is this?

MESSENGER

'Tis none; the darkest words are thine own.

LICHAS

I will go,—I was foolish to hear thee so long.

MESSENGER

No, not till thou hast answered a brief question.

LICHAS

Ask what thou wilt; thou art not taciturn.

MESSENGER

That captive, whom thou hast brought home—thou knowest whom I mean?

LICHAS

Yes; but why dost thou ask?

MESSENGER

Well, saidst thou not that thy prisoner—she, on whom thy gaze now turns so vacantly—was Iole, daughter of Eurytus?

LICHAS

Said it to whom? Who and where is the man that will be thy witness to hearing this from me?

MESSENGER

To many of our own folk thou saidst it: in the public gathering of Trachinians, a great crowd heard thus much from thee.

LICHAS

Ay—said they heard; but 'tis one thing to report a fancy, and another to make the story good.

MESSENGER

A fancy! Didst thou not say on thine oath that thou wast bringing her as a bride for Heracles?

LICHAS

I? bringing a bride?—In the name of the gods, dear mistress, tell me who this stranger may be?

MESSENGER

One who heard from thine own lips that the conquest of the whole city was due to love for this girl: the Lydian woman was not its destroyer, but the passion which this maid has kindled.

LICHAS

Lady, let this fellow withdraw: to prate with the brainsick befits not a sane man.

DEIANEIRA

Nay, I implore thee by Zeus whose lightnings go forth over the high glens of Oeta, do not cheat me of the truth! For she to whom thou wilt speak is not ungenerous, nor hath she yet to learn that the human heart is inconstant to its joys. They are not wise, then, who stand forth to buffet against Love; for Love rules the gods as he will, and me; and why not another woman, such as I am? So I am mad indeed, if I blame my husband, because that distemper hath seized him; or this woman, his partner in a thing which is no shame to them, and no wrong to me. Impossible! No; if he taught thee to speak falsely, 'tis not a noble lesson that thou art learning; or if thou art thine own teacher in this, thou wilt be found cruel when it is thy wish to prove kind. Nay, tell me the whole truth. To a free-born man, the name of liar cleaves as a deadly brand. If thy hope is to escape detection, that, too, is vain; there are many to whom thou hast spoken, who will tell me.

And if thou art afraid, thy fear is mistaken. *Not* to learn the truth,—that, indeed, would pain me; but to know it—what is there terrible in that? Hath not Heracles wedded others ere now,—ay, more than living man,—and no one of them hath had harsh word or taunt from me; nor shall this girl, though her whole being should be absorbed in her passion;

for indeed I felt a profound pity when I beheld her, because her beauty hath wrecked her life, and she, hapless one, all innocent, hath brought her fatherland to ruin and to bondage.

Well, those things must go with wind and stream.—To thee I say,—deceive whom thou wilt, but ever speak the truth to me.

LEADER

Hearken to her good counsel, and hereafter thou shalt have no cause to complain of this lady; our thanks, too, will be thine.

LICHAS

Nay, then, dear mistress,—since I see that thou thinkest as mortals should think, and canst allow for weakness,—I will tell thee the whole truth, and hide it not. Yes, it is even as yon man saith. This girl inspired that overmastering love which long ago smote through the soul of Heracles; for this girl's sake the desolate Oechalia, her home, was made the prey of his spear. And he,—it is just to him to say so,—never denied this,—never told me to conceal it. But I, lady, fearing to wound thy heart by such tidings, have sinned, if thou count this in any sort a sin.

Now, however, that thou knowest the whole story, for both your sakes,—for his, and not less for thine own,—bear with the woman, and be content that the words which thou hast spoken regarding her should bind thee still. For he, whose strength is victorious in all else, hath been utterly vanquished by his passion for this girl.

DEIANEIRA

Indeed, mine own thoughts move me to act thus. Trust me, I will not add a new affliction to my burdens by waging a fruitless fight against the gods.

But let us go into the house, that thou mayest receive my messages; and, since gifts should be meetly recompensed with gifts,—that thou mayest take these also. It is not right that thou shouldest go back with empty hands, after coming with such a goodly train.

(*Exit* MESSENGER, *as* LICHAS *and* DEIANEIRA *go into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Great and mighty is the victory which the Cyprian queen ever bears away. I stay not now to speak of the gods; I spare to tell how she beguiled the son of Cronus, and Hades, the lord of darkness, or Poseidon, shaker of the earth.

But, when this bride was to be won, who were the valiant rivals that entered the contest for her hand? Who went forth to the ordeal of battle, to the fierce blows and the blinding dust?

antistrophe

One was a mighty river-god, the dread form of a horned and four-legged bull, Acheloüs, from Oeniadae: the other came from Thebe, dear to Bacchus, with curved bow, and spears, and brandished club, the son of Zeus: who then met in combat, fain to win a bride: and the Cyprian goddess of nuptial joy was there with them, sole umpire of their strife.

epode

Then was there clatter of fists and clang of bow, and the noise of a bull's horns therewith; then were there close-locked grapplings, and deadly blows from the forehead, and loud deep cries from both.

Meanwhile, she, in her delicate beauty, sat on the side of a hill that could be seen afar, awaiting the husband that should be hers.

So the battle rages, as I have told; but the fair bride who is the prize of the strife abides the end in piteous anguish. And suddenly she is parted from her mother, as when a heifer is taken from its dam.

(DEIANEIRA *enters from the house alone, carrying in her arms a casket containing a robe.*)

DEIANEIRA

Dear friends, while our visitor is saying his farewell to the captive girls in the house, I have stolen forth to you,—partly to tell you what these hands have devised, and partly to crave your sympathy with my sorrow.

A maiden,—or, methinks, no longer a maiden, but a mistress,—hath found her way into my house, as a freight comes to a mariner,—a merchandise to make shipwreck of my peace. And now we twain are to share the same marriage-bed, the same embrace. Such is the reward that Heracles hath sent me,—he whom I called true and loyal,—for guarding his home through all that weary time. I have no thought of anger against him, often as he is vexed with this distemper. But then to live with her, sharing the same union—what woman could endure it? For I see that the flower of her age is blossoming, while mine is fading; and the eyes of men love to cull the bloom of youth, but they turn aside from the old. This, then, is my fear,—lest Heracles, in name my spouse, should be the younger's mate.

But, as I said, anger ill beseems a woman of understanding. I will tell you, friends, the way by which I hope to find deliverance and relief. I had a gift, given to me long ago by a monster of olden time, and stored in an urn of bronze; a gift which, while yet a girl, I took up from the shaggy-breasted Nessus,—from his life-blood, as he lay dying; Nessus, who used

to carry men in his arms for hire across the deep waters of the Evenus, using no oar to waft them, nor sail of ship.

I, too, was carried on his shoulders,—when, by my father's sending, I first went forth with Heracles as his wife; and when I was in mid-stream, he touched me with wanton hands. I shrieked; the son of Zeus turned quickly round, and shot a feathered arrow; it whizzed through his breast to the lungs; and, in his mortal faintness, thus much the Centaur spake:—

'Child of aged Oeneus, thou shalt have at least this profit of my ferrying,—if thou wilt hearken,—because thou wast the last whom I conveyed. If thou gatherest with thy hands the blood clotted round my wound, at the place where the Hydra, Lerna's monstrous growth, hath tinged the arrow with black gall,—this shall be to thee a charm for the soul of Heracles, so that he shall never look upon any woman to love her more than thee.'

I bethought me of this, my friends—for, after his death, I had kept it carefully locked up in a secret place; and I have anointed this robe, doing everything to it as he enjoined while he lived. The work is finished. May deeds of wicked daring be ever far from my thoughts, and from my knowledge,—as I abhor the women who attempt them! But if in any wise I may prevail against this girl by love-spells and charms used on Heracles, the means to that end are ready;—unless, indeed, I seem to be acting rashly: if so, I will desist forthwith.

LEADER

Nay, if these measures give any ground of confidence, we think that thy design is not amiss.

DEIANEIRA

Well, the ground stands thus,—there is a fair promise; but I have not yet essayed the proof.

LEADER

Nay, knowledge must come through action; thou canst have no test which is not fanciful, save by trial.

DEIANEIRA

Well, we shall know presently:—for there I see the man already at the doors; and he will soon be going.—Only may my secret be well kept by you! While thy deeds are hidden, even though they be not seemly, thou wilt never be brought to shame.

(LICHAS *enters from the house.*)

LICHAS

What are thy commands? Give me my charge, daughter of Oeneus; for already I have tarried over long.

DEIANEIRA

Indeed, I have just been seeing to this for thee, Lichas, while thou wast speaking to the stranger maidens in the house;—that thou shouldest take for me this long robe, woven by mine own hand, a gift to mine absent lord.

And when thou givest it, charge him that he, and no other, shall be the first to wear it; that it shall not be seen by the light of the sun, nor by the sacred precinct, nor by the fire at the hearth, until he stand forth, conspicuous before all eyes, and show it to the gods on a day when bulls are slain.

For thus had I vowed,—that if I should ever see or hear that he had come safely home, I would duly clothe him in this robe, and so present him to the gods, newly radiant at their altar in new garb.

As proof, thou shalt carry a token, which he will quickly recognise within the circle of this seal.

Now go thy way; and, first, remember the rule that messengers should not be meddlers; next, so bear thee that my thanks may be joined to his, doubling the grace which thou shalt win.

LICHAS

Nay, if I ply this herald-craft of Hermes with any sureness, I will never trip in doing thine errand: I will not fail to deliver this casket as it is, and to add thy words in attestation of thy gift.

DEIANEIRA

Thou mayest be going now; for thou knowest well how things are with us in the house.

LICHAS

I know, and will report, that all hath prospered.

DEIANEIRA

And then thou hast seen the greeting given to the stranger maiden—thou knowest how I welcomed her?

LICHAS

So that my heart was filled with wondering joy.

DEIANEIRA

What more, then, is there for thee to tell? I am afraid that it would be too soon to speak of the longing on my part, before we know if I am longed for there.

(LICHAS *departs with the casket and* DEIANEIRA *retires into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O ye who dwell by the warm springs between haven and crag, and by Oeta's heights; O dwellers by the land-locked waters of the Malian sea, on the shore sacred to the virgin-goddess of the golden shafts, where the Greeks meet in famous council at the Gates;

antistrophe 1

Soon shall the glorious voice of the flute go up for you again, resounding with no harsh strain of grief, but with such music as the lyre maketh to the gods! For the son whom Alcmena bore to Zeus is hastening homeward, with the trophies of all prowess.

strophe 2

He was lost utterly to our land, a wanderer over sea, while we waited through twelve long months, and knew nothing; and his loving wife, sad dweller with sad thoughts, was ever pining amid her tears. But now the War-god, roused to fury, hath delivered her from the days of her mourning.

antistrophe 2

May he come, may he come! Pause not the many-oared ship that carries him, till he shall have reached this town, leaving the island altar where, as rumour saith, he is sacrificing! Thence may he come, full of desire, steeped in love by the specious device of the robe, on which Persuasion hath spread her sovereign charm!

(DEIANEIRA *comes out of the house in agitation.*)

DEIANEIRA

Friends, how I fear that I may have gone too far in all that I have been doing just now!

LEADER

What hath happened, Deianeira, daughter of Oeneus?

DEIANEIRA

I know not; but feel a misgiving that I shall presently be found to have wrought a great mischief, the issue of a fair hope.

LEADER

It is nothing, surely, that concerns thy gift to Heracles?

DEIANEIRA

Yea, even so. And henceforth I would say to all, act not with zeal, if ye act without light.

LEADER

Tell us the cause of thy fear, if it may be told.

DEIANEIRA

A thing hath come to pass, my friends, such that, if I declare it, ye will hear a marvel whereof none could have dreamed.

That with which I was lately anointing the festal robe,—a white tuft of fleecy sheep's wool,—hath disappeared,—not consumed by anything in the house, but self-devoured and self-destroyed, as it crumbled down from the surface of a stone. But I must tell the story more at length, that thou mayest know exactly how this thing befell.

I neglected no part of the precepts which the savage Centaur gave me, when the bitter barb was rankling in his side: they were in my memory, like the graven words which no hand may wash from a tablet of bronze. Now these were his orders, and I obeyed them:—to keep this unguent in a secret place, always remote from fire and from the sun's warm ray, until I should apply it, newly spread, where I wished. So had I done. And now, when the moment for action had come, I performed the anointing privily in the house, with a tuft of soft wool which I had plucked from a sheep of our home-flock; then I folded up my gift, and laid it, unvisited by sunlight, within its casket, as ye saw.

But as I was going back into the house, I beheld a thing too wondrous for words, and passing the wit of man to understand. I happened to have thrown the shred of wool, with which I had been preparing the robe, into the full blaze of the sunshine. As it grew warm, it shrivelled all away, and quickly crumbled to powder on the ground, like nothing so much as the dust shed from a saw's teeth where men work timber. In such a state it lies as it fell. And from the earth, where it was strewn, clots of foam seethed up, as when the rich juice of the blue fruit from the vine of Bacchus is poured upon the ground.

So I know not, hapless one, whither to turn my thoughts; I only see that I have done a fearful deed. Why or wherefore should the monster, in his death-throes, have shown good will to me, on whose account he was dying? Impossible! No, he was cajoling me, in order to slay the man who had smitten him: and I gain the knowledge of this too late, when it avails no more. Yes, I alone—unless my foreboding prove false—I, wretched one, must destroy him! For I know that the arrow which made the wound did scathe even to the god Cheiron; and it kills all beasts that it touches. And since 'tis this same black venom in the blood that hath passed out

through the wound of Nessus, must it not kill my lord also? I ween it must.

Howbeit, I am resolved that, if he is to fall, at the same time I also shall be swept from life; for no woman could bear to live with an evil name, if she rejoices that her nature is not evil.

LEADER

Mischief must needs be feared; but it is not well to doom our hope before the event.

DEIANEIRA

Unwise counsels leave no room even for a hope which can lend courage.

LEADER

Yet towards those who have erred unwittingly, men's anger is softened; and so it should be towards thee.

DEIANEIRA

Nay, such words are not for one who has borne a part in the ill deed, but only for him who has no trouble at his own door.

LEADER

'Twere well to refrain from further speech, unless thou would'st tell aught to thine own son; for he is at hand, who went erewhile to seek his sire.

(*Enter* HYLLUS)

HYLLUS

O mother, would that one of three things had befallen thee! Would that thou wert dead,—or, if living, no mother of mine,—or that some new and better spirit had passed into thy bosom.

DEIANEIRA

Ah, my son, what cause have I given thee to abhor me?

HYLLUS

I tell thee that thy husband—yea, my sire—hath been done to death by thee this day!

DEIANEIRA

Oh, what word hath passed thy lips, my child!

HYLLUS

A word that shall not fail of fulfilment; for who may undo that which hath come to pass?

DEIANEIRA

What saidst thou, my son? Who is thy warranty for charging me with a deed so terrible?

HYLLUS

I have seen my father's grievous fate with mine own eyes; I speak not from hearsay.

DEIANEIRA

And where didst thou find him,—where didst thou stand at his side?

HYLLUS

If thou art to hear it, then must all be told.

After sacking the famous town of Eurytus, he went his way with the trophies and first-fruits of victory. There is a sea-washed headland of Euboea, Cape Cenaeum, where he dedicated altars and a sacred grove to the Zeus of his fathers; and there I first heheld him, with the joy of yearning love.

He was about to celebrate a great sacrifice, when his own herald, Lichas, came to him from home, bearing thy gift, the deadly robe; which he put on, according to thy precept; and then began his offering with twelve bulls, free from blemish, the firstlings of the spoil; but altogether he brought a hundred victims, great or small, to the altar.

At first, hapless one, he prayed with serene soul, rejoicing in his comely garb. But when the blood-fed flame began to blaze from the holy offerings and from the resinous pine, a sweat broke forth upon his flesh, and the tunic clung to his sides, at every joint, close-glued, as if by a craftsman's hand; there came a biting pain that racked his bones; and then the venom, as of some deadly, cruel viper, began to devour him.

Thereupon he shouted for the unhappy Lichas,—in no wise to blame for thy crime,—asking what treason had moved him to bring that robe; but he, all-unknowing, hapless one, said that he had brought the gift from thee alone, as it had been sent. When his master heard it, as a piercing spasm clutched his lungs, he caught him by the foot, where the ankle turns in the socket, and hurled him at a surf-beaten rock in the sea; and he made the white brain to ooze from the hair, as the skull was dashed to splinters, and blood scattered therewith.

But all the people lifted up a cry of awe-struck grief, seeing that one was frenzied, and the other slain; and no one dared to come before the man. For the pain dragged him to earth, or made him leap into the air, with yells and shrieks, till the cliffs rang around, steep headlands of Locris, and Euboean capes.

But when he was spent with oft throwing himself on the ground in his anguish, and oft making loud lament,—cursing his fatal marriage with

thee, the vile one, and his alliance with Oeneus,—saying how he had found in it the ruin of his life,—then, from out of the shrouding altar-smoke, he lifted up his wildly-rolling eyes, and saw me in the great crowd, weeping. He turned his gaze on me, and called me: 'O son, draw near; do not fly from my trouble, even though thou must share my death. Come, bear me forth, and set me, if thou canst, in a place where no man shall see me; or, if thy pity forbids that, at least convey me with all speed out of this land, and let me not die where I am.'

That command sufficed; we laid him in mid-ship, and brought him—but hardly brought him—to this shore, moaning in his torments. And ye shall presently behold him, alive, or lately dead.

Such, mother, are the designs and deeds against my sire whereof thou hast been found guilty. May avenging Justice and the Erinys visit thee for them! Yes, if it be right, that is my prayer: and right it is,—for I have seen thee trample on the right, by slaying the noblest man in all the world, whose like thou shalt see nevermore!

(DEIANEIRA *moves towards the house.*)

LEADER (*to* DEIANEIRA)

Why dost thou depart in silence? Knowest thou not that such silence pleads for thine accuser?

(DEIANEIRA *goes in the house.*)

HYLLUS

Let her depart. A fair wind speed her far from my sight! Why should the name of mother bring her a semblance of respect, when she is all unlike a mother in her deeds? No, let her go,—farewell to her; and may such joy as she gives my sire become her own!

(*Exit* HYLLUS, *into the house.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

See, maidens, how suddenly the divine word of the old prophecy hath come upon us, which said that, when the twelfth year should have run through its full tale of months, it should end the series of toils for the true-born son of Zeus! And that promise is wafted surely to its fulfilment. For how shall he who beholds not the light have toilsome servitude any more beyond the grave?

antistrophe 1

If a cloud of death is around him, and the doom wrought by the Centaur's craft is stinging his sides, where cleaves the venom which Thanatos begat and the gleaming serpent nourished, how can he look upon to-morrow's sun,—when that appalling Hydra-shape holds him

in its grip, and those murderous goads, prepared by the wily words of black-haired Nessus, have started into fury, vexing him with tumultuous pain?

strophe 2

Of such things this hapless lady had no foreboding; but she saw a great mischief swiftly coming on her home from the new marriage. Her own hand applied the remedy; but for the issues of a stranger's counsel, given at a fatal meeting,—for these, I ween, she makes despairing lament, shedding the tender dew of plenteous tears. And the coming fate foreshadows a great misfortune, contrived by guile.

antistrophe 2

Our streaming tears break forth: alas, a plague is upon him more piteous than any suffering that foemen ever brought upon that glorious hero.

Ah, thou dark steel of the spear foremost in battle, by whose might yonder bride was lately borne so swiftly from Oechalia's heights! But the Cyprian goddess, ministering in silence, hath been plainly proved the doer of these deeds.

LEADER OF ONE SEMI-CHORUS

Is it fancy, or do I hear some cry of grief just passing through the house? What is this?

LEADER OF OTHER SEMI-CHORUS

No uncertain sound, but a wail of anguish from within: the house hath some new trouble.

LEADER OF WHOLE CHORUS

And mark how sadly, with what a cloud upon her brow, that aged woman approaches, to give us tidings.

(*Enter* NURSE, *from the house.*)

NURSE

Ah, my daughters, great, indeed, were the sorrows that we were to reap from the gift sent to Heracles!

LEADER

Aged woman, what new mischance hast thou to tell?

NURSE

Deianeira hath departed on the last of all her journeys, departed without stirring foot.

LEADER

Thou speakest not of death?

NURSE

My tale is told.

LEADER

Dead, hapless one?

NURSE

Again thou hearest it.

CHORUS

Hapless, lost one! Say, what was the manner of her death?

NURSE

Oh, a cruel deed was there!

CHORUS

Speak, woman, how hath she met her doom?

NURSE

By her own hand hath she died.

CHORUS

What fury, what pangs of frenzy have cut her off by the edge of a dire weapon? How contrived she this death, following death,—all wrought by her alone?

NURSE

By the stroke of the sword that makes sorrow.

CHORUS

Sawest thou that violent deed, poor helpless one?

NURSE

I saw it; yea, I was standing near.

CHORUS

Whence came it? How was it done? Oh, speak!

NURSE

'Twas the work of her own mind and her own hand.

CHORUS

What dost thou tell us?

NURSE

The sure truth.

CHORUS

The first-born, the first-born of that new bride is a dread Erinys for this house!

NURSE

Too true; and, hadst thou been an eye-witness of the action, verily thy pity would have been yet deeper.

LEADER

And could a woman's hand dare to do such deeds?

NURSE

Yea, with dread daring; thou shalt hear, and then thou wilt bear me witness.

When she came alone into the house, and saw her son preparing a deep litter in the court, that he might go back with it to meet his sire, then she hid herself where none might see; and, falling before the altars, she wailed aloud that they were left desolate; and, when she touched any household thing that she had been wont to use, poor lady, in the past, her tears would flow; or when, roaming hither and thither through the house, she beheld the form of any well-loved servant, she wept, hapless one, at that sight, crying aloud upon her own fate, and that of the household which would thenceforth be in the power of others.

But when she ceased from this, suddenly I beheld her rush into the chamber of Heracles. From a secret place of espial, I watched her; and saw her spreading coverings on the couch of her lord. When she had done this, she sprang thereon, and sat in the middle of the bed; her tears burst forth in burning streams, and thus she spake: 'Ah, bridal bed and bridal chamber mine, farewell now and for ever; never more shall ye receive me to rest upon this couch.' She said no more, but with a vehement hand loosed her robe, where the gold-wrought brooch lay above her breast, baring all her left side and arm. Then I ran with all my strength, and warned her son of her intent. But lo, in the space between my going and our return, she had driven a two-edged sword through her side to the heart.

At that sight, her son uttered a great cry; for he knew, alas, that in his anger he had driven her to that deed; and he had learned, too late, from the servants in the house that she had acted without knowledge, by the prompting of the Centaur. And now the youth, in his misery, bewailed her with all passionate lament; he knelt, and showered kisses on her lips; he threw himself at her side upon the ground, bitterly crying that he had rashly smitten her with a slander,—weeping, that he must now live bereaved of both alike,—of mother and of sire.

Such are the fortunes of this house. Rash indeed, is he who reckons on

the morrow, or haply on days beyond it; for to-morrow is not, until to-day is safely past.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Which woe shall I bewail first, which misery is the greater? Alas, 'tis hard for me to tell.

antistrophe 1

One sorrow may be seen in the house: for one we wait with foreboding: and suspense hath a kinship with pain.

strophe 2

Oh that some strong breeze might come with wafting power unto our hearth, to bear me far from this land, lest I die of terror, when I look but once upon the mighty son of Zeus!

For they say that he is approaching the house in torments from which there is no deliverance, a wonder of unutterable woe.

antistrophe 2

Ah, it was not far off, but close to us, that woe of which my lament gave warning, like the nightingale's piercing note!

Men of an alien race are coming yonder. And how, then, are they bringing him? In sorrow, as for some loved one, they move on their mournful, noiseless march.

Alas, he is brought in silence! What are we to think; that he is dead, or sleeping?

(*Enter* HYLLUS *and an* OLD MAN, *with attendants, bearing* HERACLES *upon a litter.*)

HYLLUS

Woe is me for thee, my father, woe is me for thee, wretched that I am! Whither shall I turn? What can I do? Ah me!

OLD MAN (*whispering*)

Hush, my son! Rouse not the cruel pain that infuriates thy sire! He lives, though prostrated. Oh, put a stern restraint upon thy lips!

HYLLUS

How sayest thou, old man—is he alive?

OLD MAN (*whispering*)

Thou must not awake the slumberer! Thou must not rouse and revive the dread frenzy that visits him, my son!

HYLLUS

Nay, I am crushed with this weight of misery—there is madness in my heart!

HERACLES (*awaking*)

O Zeus, to what land have I come? Who are these among whom I lie, tortured with unending agonies? Wretched, wretched that I am! Oh, that dire pest is gnawing me once more!

OLD MAN (*to* HYLLUS)

Knew I not how much better it was that thou shouldest keep silence, instead of scaring slumber from his brain and eyes?

HYLLUS

Nay, I cannot be patient when I behold this misery.

HERACLES

O thou Cenaean rock whereon mine altars rose, what a cruel reward hast thou won me for those fair offerings,—be Zeus my witness! Ah, to what ruin hast thou brought me, to what ruin! Would that I had never beheld thee for thy sorrow! Then had I never come face to face with this fiery madness, which no spell can soothe! Where is the charmer, where is the cunning healer, save Zeus alone, that shall lull this plague to rest? I should marvel, if he ever came within my ken!

strophe 1

Ah!

Leave me, hapless one, to my rest—leave me to my last rest!

strophe 2

Where art thou touching me? Whither wouldst thou turn me? Thou wilt kill me, thou wilt kill me! If there be any pang that slumbers, thou hast aroused it!

It hath seized me,—oh, the pest comes again!—Whence are ye, most ungrateful of all the Greeks? I wore out my troublous days in ridding Greece of pests, on the deep and in all forests; and now, when I am stricken, will no man succour me with merciful fire or sword?

antistrophe 1

Oh, will no one come and sever the head, at one fierce stroke, from this wretched body? Woe, woe is me!

OLD MAN

Son of Heracles, this task exceeds my strength,—help thou,—for strength is at thy command, too largely to need my aid in his relief.

HYLLUS

My hands are helping; but no resource, in myself or from another, avails me to make his life forget its anguish:—such is the doom appointed by Zeus!

HERACLES

strophe 3

O my son, where art thou? Raise me,—take hold of me,—thus, thus! Alas, my destiny!

antistrophe 2

Again, again the cruel pest leaps forth to rend me, the fierce plague with which none may cope!

O Pallas, Pallas, it tortures me again! Alas, my son, pity thy sire, —draw a blameless sword, and smite beneath my collar-bone, and heal this pain wherewith thy godless mother hath made me wild! So may I see her fall,—thus, even thus, as she hath destroyed me!

antistrophe 3

Sweet Hades, brother of Zeus, give me rest, give me rest,—end my woe by a swiftly-sped doom!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I shudder, friends, to hear these sorrows of our lord; what a man is here, and what torments afflict him!

HERACLES

Ah, fierce full oft, and grievous not in name alone, have been the labours of these hands, the burdens borne upon these shoulders! But no toil ever laid on me by the wife of Zeus or by the hateful Eurystheus was like unto this thing which the daughter of Oeneus, fair and false, hath fastened upon my back,—this woven net of the Furies, in which I perish! Glued to my sides, it hath eaten my flesh to the inmost parts; it is ever with me, sucking the channels of my breath; already it hath drained my fresh life-blood, and my whole body is wasted, a captive to these unutterable bonds.

Not the warrior on the battle-field, not the Giants' earth-born host, nor the might of savage beasts, hath ever done unto me thus,—not Hellas, nor the land of the alien, nor any land to which I have come as a deliverer: no, a woman, a weak woman, born not to the strength of man, all alone hath vanquished me, without stroke of sword!

Son, show thyself my son indeed, and do not honour a mother's name above a sire's: bring forth the woman that bare thee, and give her with thine own hands into my hand, that I may know of a truth which sight grieves thee most,—my tortured frame, or hers, when she suffers her righteous doom!

Go, my son, shrink not—and show thy pity for me, whom many might deem pitiful,—for me, moaning and weeping like a girl;—and the man lives not who can say that he ever saw me do thus before; no, without complaining I still went whither mine evil fortune led. But now, alas, the strong man hath been found a woman.

Approach, stand near thy sire, and see what a fate it is that hath brought me to this pass; for I will lift the veil. Behold! Look, all of you, on this miserable body; see how wretched, how piteous is my plight!

Ah, woe is me!

The burning throe of torment is there anew, it darts through my sides —I must wrestle once more with that cruel, devouring plague!

O thou lord of the dark realm, receive me! Smite me, O fire of Zeus! Hurl down thy thunderbolt, O King, send it, O father, upon my head! For again the pest is consuming me; it hath blazed forth, it hath started into fury! O hands, my hands, O shoulders and breast and trusty arms, ye, now in this plight, are the same whose force of old subdued the dweller in Nemea, the scourge of herdsmen, the lion, a creature that no man might approach or confront; ye tamed the Lernaean Hydra, and that monstrous host of double form, man joined to steed, a race with whom none may commune, violent, lawless, of surpassing might; ye tamed the Erymanthian beast, and the three-headed whelp of Hades underground, a resistless terror, offspring of the dread Echidna; ye tamed the dragon that guarded the golden fruit in the utmost places of the earth.

These toils and countless others have I proved, nor hath any man vaunted a triumph over my prowess. But now, with joints unhinged and with flesh torn to shreds, I have become the miserable prey of an unseen destroyer,—I, who am called the son of noblest mother,—I, whose reputed sire is Zeus, lord of the starry sky.

But ye may be sure of one thing:—though I am as nought, though I cannot move a step, yet she who hath done this deed shall feel my heavy hand even now: let her but come, and she shall learn to proclaim this message unto all, that in my death, as in my life, I chastised the wicked!

LEADER

Ah, hapless Greece, what mourning do I foresee for her, if she must lose this man!

HYLLUS

Father, since thy pause permits an answer, hear me, afflicted though thou art. I will ask thee for no more than is my due. Accept my counsels, in a calmer mood than that to which this anger stings thee: else thou canst not learn how vain is thy desire for vengeance, and how causeless thy resentment.

HERACLES

Say what thou wilt, and cease; in this my pain I understand nought of all thy riddling words.

HYLLUS

I come to tell thee of my mother,—how it is now with her, and how she sinned unwittingly.

HERACLES

Villain! What—hast thou dared to breathe her name again in my hearing,—the name of the mother who hath slain thy sire?

HYLLUS

Yea, such is her state that silence is unmeet.

HERACLES

Unmeet, truly, in view of her past crimes.

HYLLUS

And also of her deeds this day,—as thou wilt own.

HERACLES

Speak,—but give heed that thou be not found a traitor.

HYLLUS

These are my tidings. She is dead, lately slain.

HERACLES

By whose hand? A wondrous message, from a prophet of ill-omened voice!

HYLLUS

By her own hand, and no stranger's.

HERACLES

Alas, ere she died by mine, as she deserved!

HYLLUS

Even thy wrath would be turned, couldst thou hear all.

HERACLES

A strange preamble; but unfold thy meaning.

HYLLUS

The sum is this;—she erred, with a good intent.

HERACLES

Is it a good deed, thou wretch, to have slain thy sire?

HYLLUS

Nay, she thought to use a love-charm for thy heart, when she saw the new bride in the house; but missed her aim.

HERACLES

And what Trachinian deals in spells so potent?

HYLLUS

Nessus the Centaur persuaded her of old to inflame thy desire with such a charm.

HERACLES

Alas, alas, miserable that I am! Woe is me, I am lost,—undone, undone! No more for me the light of day! Alas, now I see in what a plight I stand! Go, my son,—for thy father's end hath come,—summon, I pray thee, all thy brethren; summon, too, the hapless Alcmena, in vain the bride of Zeus,—that ye may learn from my dying lips what oracles I know.

HYLLUS

Nay, thy mother is not here; as it chances, she hath her abode at Tiryns by the sea. Some of thy children she hath taken to live with her there, and others, thou wilt find, are dwelling in Thebe's town. But we who are with thee, my father, will render all service that is needed, at thy bidding.

HERACLES

Hear, then, thy task: now is the time to show what stuff is in thee, who art called my son.

It was foreshown to me by my Sire of old that I should perish by no creature that had the breath of life, but by one that had passed to dwell with Hades. So I have been slain by this savage Centaur, the living by the dead, even as the divine will had been foretold.

And I will show thee how later oracles tally therewith, confirming the old prophecy. I wrote them down in the grove of the Selli, dwellers on the hills, whose couch is on the ground; they were given by my Father's oak of many tongues; which said that, at the time which liveth and now is, my release from the toils laid upon me should be accomplished. And I

looked for prosperous days; but the meaning, it seems, was only that I should die; for toil comes no more to the dead.

Since, then, my son, those words are clearly finding their fulfilment, thou, on thy part, must lend me thine aid. Thou must not delay, and so provoke me to bitter speech: thou must consent and help with a good grace, as one who hath learned that best of laws, obedience to a sire.

HYLLUS

Yea, father,—though I fear the issue to which our talk hath brought me,—I will do thy good pleasure.

HERACLES

First of all, lay thy right hand in mine.

HYLLUS

For what purpose dost thou insist upon his pledge?

HERACLES

Give thy hand at once—disobey me not!

HYLLUS

Lo, there it is: thou shalt not be gainsaid.

HERACLES

Now, swear by the head of Zeus my sire!

HYLLUS

To do what deed? May this also be told?

HERACLES

To perform for me the task that I shall enjoin.

HYLLUS

I swear it, with Zeus for witness of the oath.

HERACLES

And pray that, if thou break this oath, thou mayest suffer.

HYLLUS

I shall not suffer, for I shall keep it:—yet so I pray.

HERACLES

Well, thou knowest the summit of Oeta, sacred to Zeus?

HYLLUS

Ay; I have often stood at his altar on that height.

HERACLES

Thither, then, thou must carry me up with thine own hands, aided by what friends thou wilt; thou shalt lop many a branch from the deep-rooted oak, and hew many a faggot also from the sturdy stock of the wild-olive; thou shalt lay my body thereupon, and kindle it with flaming pine-torch.

And let no tear of mourning be seen there; no, do this without lament and without weeping, if thou art indeed my son. But if thou do it not, even from the world below my curse and my wrath shall wait on thee for ever.

HYLLUS

Alas, my father, what hast thou spoken? How has thou dealt with me!

HERACLES

I have spoken that which thou must perform; if thou wilt not, then get thee some other sire, and be called my son no more!

HYLLUS

Woe, woe is me! What a deed dost thou require of me, my father,—that I should become thy murderer, guilty of thy blood!

HERACLES

Not so, in truth, but healer of my sufferings, sole physician of my pain!

HYLLUS

And how, by enkindling thy body, shall I heal it?

HERACLES

Nay, if that thought dismay thee, at least perform the rest.

HYLLUS

The service of carrying thee shall not be refused.

HERACLES

And the heaping of the pyre, as I have bidden?

HYLLUS

Yea, save that I will not touch it with mine own hand. All else will I do, and thou shalt have no hindrance on my part.

HERACLES

Well, so much shall be enough.—But add one small boon to thy large benefits.

HYLLUS

Be the boon never so large, it shall be granted.

HERACLES

Knowest thou, then, the girl whose sire was Eurytus?

HYLLUS

It is of Iole that thou speakest, if I mistake not.

HERACLES

Even so. This, in brief, is the charge that I give thee, my son. When I am dead, if thou wouldest show a pious remembrance of thine oath unto thy father, disobey me not, but take this woman to be thy wife. Let no other espouse her who hath lain at my side, but do thou, O my son, make that marriage-bond thine own. Consent: after loyalty in great matters, to rebel in less is to cancel the grace that had been won.

HYLLUS

Ah me, it is not well to be angry with a sick man: but who could bear to see him in such a mind?

HERACLES

Thy words show no desire to do my bidding.

HYLLUS

What! When she alone is to blame for my mother's death, and for thy present plight besides? Lives there the man who would make such a choice, unless he were maddened by avenging fiends?

Better were it, father, that I too should die, rather than live united to the worst of our foes!

HERACLES

He will render no reverence, it seems, to my dying prayer.—Nay, be sure that the curse of the gods will attend thee for disobedience to my voice.

HYLLUS

Ah, thou wilt soon show, methinks, how distempered thou art!

HERACLES

Yea, for thou art breaking the slumber of my plague.

HYLLUS

Hapless that I am! What perplexities surround me!

HERACLES

Yea, since thou deignest not to hear thy sire.

HYLLUS

But must I learn, then, to be impious, my father?

HERACLES

'Tis not impiety, if thou shalt gladden my heart.

HYLLUS

Dost thou command me, then, to do this deed, as a clear duty?

HERACLES

I command thee,—the gods bear me witness!

HYLLUS

Then will I do it, and refuse not,—calling upon the gods to witness thy deed. I can never be condemned for loyalty to thee, my father.

HERACLES

Thou endest well; and to these words, my son, quickly add the gracious deed, that thou mayest lay me on the pyre before any pain returns to rend or sting me.

Come, make haste and lift me! This, in truth, is rest from troubles; this is the end, the last end, of Heracles!

HYLLUS

Nothing, indeed, hinders the fulfilment of thy wish, since thy command constrains us, my father.

HERACLES (*chanting*)

Come, then, ere thou arouse this plague, O my stubborn soul, give me a curb as of steel on lips set like stone to stone, and let no cry escape them; seeing that the deed which thou art to do, though done perforce, is yet worthy of thy joy!

HYLLUS (*chanting*)

Lift him, followers! And grant me full forgiveness for this; but mark the great cruelty of the gods in the deeds that are being done. They beget children, they are hailed as fathers, and yet they can look upon such sufferings.

(*The attendants raise* HERACLES *on the litter and move slowly off, as* HYLLUS *chants to the* CHORUS *in the closing lines.*)

No man foresees the future; but the present is fraught with mourning for us, and with shame for the powers above, and verily with anguish beyond compare for him who endures this doom.

Maidens, come ye also, nor linger at the house; ye who have lately seen a dread death, with sorrows manifold and strange: and in all this there is nought but Zeus.[1]

1. There is a puzzling, almost Euripidean, ring to these last lines. They scarcely reflect the normal thought of Sophocles. It may be reasonable to suggest that the lines are a result of the poet's inability to resolve to his satisfaction the problems of the concluding section of the play.

V
ELECTRA

Characters in the Play

Orestes, *son of Agamemnon and* Clytemnestra
Electra
Chrysothemis } *sisters of* Orestes
An Old Man, *formerly the* Paedagogus *or Attendant of* Orestes
Clytemnestra
Aegisthus
Chorus of Women of Mycenae

Mute Persons

Pylades, *son of Strophius, King of Crisa, the friend of* Orestes.
A handmaid of Clytemnestra. Two attendants of Orestes

INTRODUCTION

THE *Electra*, the date of whose composition is unknown, gives us Sophocles' version of the legendary events interpreted by Aeschylus in his *Choephori*, and Euripides in his *Electra*. Sophocles' plot differs only in minor points from that of Aeschylus. In the Sophoclean play Orestes, whom Electra saved as a child by placing him in the care of the friendly King Strophius in Phocis, returns to avenge the murder of his father, Agamemnon. Clytemnestra and her paramour, Aegisthus, the murderers of Agamemnon on his return from Troy, have been ruling in Argos, but are haunted by the fear that one day Orestes will return to wreak his vengeance. Electra, who has made no effort to conceal her hatred for Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, has been brutally treated by them, whereas her sisters by prudent silence have lived comfortably in the palace. Electra has clung steadfastly through long years to the hope that Orestes will appear to right the wrongs that she and her father have suffered. The play opens dramatically with the entrance of the long-absent Orestes.

Electra is the focal point of the play. Sophocles gives her a full-length portrait, largely through his familiar technique of placing her in contrast with the other persons of the play. In the scene with her sister, Chrysothemis, a close parallel to the scene between Antigone and Ismene in the *Antigone*, Electra's courage and fixity of purpose clearly emerge. Further details are added to the characterization when she comes face to face with Clytemnestra, or again, in a most dramatically effective scene, when she addresses the urn which she believes to contain the ashes of her brother, although, unknown to her, her brother stands living at her side. By the end of the play, Sophocles has skilfully delineated every salient feature of her being.

The action of the play centres on the consummation of an act of vengeance. In Aeschylus, the religious and psychological implications of such an act loom large, as do the psychological and emotional factors in the Euripidean counterpart. In the Sophoclean rendering, the act of murder and matricide is condoned. No Furies threaten Orestes, and the play ends on a note of triumph. It has been argued that Sophocles is here being archaic, if not archaistic, and is dealing with the problem in a

Homeric fashion, or at least according to a pre-Aeschylean theology. Perhaps it may be that Sophocles here was not primarily interested in probing the religious aspects of his problem, but rather in the psychological study, on the human level, of an individual caught in this particular situation. In this sense our play may be regarded as a dimly remote ancestor of *Hamlet* and dramas of its type.

ELECTRA

(SCENE:—*At Mycenae, before the palace of the Pelopidae. It is morning and the new-risen sun is bright. The* PAEDAGOGUS *enters on the left of the spectators, accompanied by the two youths,* ORESTES *and* PYLADES.)

PAEDAGOGUS

SON of him who led our hosts at Troy of old, son of Agamemnon!—now thou mayest behold with thine eyes all that thy soul hath desired so long. There is the ancient Argos of thy yearning,—that hallowed scene whence the gad-fly drove the daughter of Inachus; and there, Orestes, is the Lycean Agora, named from the wolf-slaying god; there, on the left, Hera's famous temple; and in this place to which we have come, deem that thou seest Mycenae rich in gold, with the house of the Pelopidae there, so often stained with bloodshed; whence I carried thee of yore, from the slaying of thy father, as thy kinswoman, thy sister, charged me; and saved thee, and reared thee up to manhood, to be the avenger of thy murdered sire.

Now, therefore, Orestes, and thou, best of friends, Pylades, our plans must be laid quickly; for lo, already the sun's bright ray is waking the songs of the birds into clearness, and the dark night of stars is spent. Before, then, anyone comes forth from the house, take counsel; seeing that the time allows not of delay, but is full ripe for deeds.

ORESTES

True friend and follower, how well dost thou prove thy loyalty to our house! As a steed of generous race, though old, loses not courage in danger, but pricks his ear, even so thou urgest us forward, and art foremost in our support. I will tell thee, then, what I have determined; listen closely to my words, and correct me, if I miss the mark in aught.

When I went to the Pythian oracle, to learn how I might avenge my father on his murderers, Phoebus gave me the response which thou art now to hear:—that alone, and by stealth, without aid of arms or numbers, I should snatch the righteous vengeance of my hand. Since, then, the god spake to us on this wise, thou must go into yonder house, when oppor-

tunity gives thee entrance, and learn all that is passing there, so that thou mayest report to us from sure knowledge. Thine age, and the lapse of time, will prevent them from recognising thee; they will never suspect who thou art, with that silvered hair. Let thy tale be that thou art a Phocian stranger, sent by Phanoteus; for he is the greatest of their allies. Tell them, and confirm it with thine oath, that Orestes hath perished by a fatal chance,—hurled at the Pythian games from his rapid chariot; be that the substance of thy story.

We, meanwhile, will first crown my father's tomb, as the god enjoined, with drink-offerings and the luxuriant tribute of severed hair; then come back, bearing in our hands an urn of shapely bronze,—now hidden in the brushwood, as I think thou knowest,—so to gladden them with the false tidings that this my body is no more, but has been consumed with fire and turned to ashes. Why should the omen trouble me, when by a feigned death I find life indeed, and win renown? I trow, no word is ill-omened, if fraught with gain. Often ere now have I seen wise men die in vain report; then, when they return home, they are held in more abiding honour: as I trust that from this rumour I also shall emerge in radiant life, and yet shine like a star upon my foes.

O my fatherland, and ye gods of the land, receive me with good fortune in this journey,—and ye also, halls of my fathers, for I come with a divine mandate to cleanse you righteously; send me not dishonoured from the land, but grant that I may rule over my possessions, and restore my house!

Enough;—be it now thy care, old man, to go and heed thy task; and we twain will go forth; for so occasion bids, chief ruler of every enterprise for men.

ELECTRA (*within*)

Ah me, ah me!

PAEDAGOGUS

Hark, my son,—from the doors, methought, came the sound of some handmaid moaning within.

ORESTES

Can it be the hapless Electra? Shall we stay here, and listen to her laments?

PAEDAGOGUS

No, no: before all else, let us seek to obey the command of Loxias, and thence make a fair beginning, by pouring libations to thy sire; that brings victory within our grasp, and gives us the mastery in all that we do.

(*Exeunt* PAEDAGOGUS *on the spectators' left,* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *on the right.—Enter* ELECTRA, *from the house. She is meanly clad.*)

ELECTRA (*chanting*)

systema

O thou pure sunlight, and thou air, earth's canopy, how often have ye heard the strains of my lament, the wild blows dealt against this bleeding breast, when dark night fails! And my wretched couch in yonder house of woe knows well, ere now, how I keep the watches of the night,—how often I bewail my hapless sire; to whom deadly Ares gave not of his gifts in a strange land, but my mother, and her mate Aegisthus, cleft his head with murderous axe, as woodmen fell an oak. And for this no plaint bursts from any lip save mine, when thou, my father, hath died a death so cruel and so piteous!

antisystema

But never will I cease from dirge and sore lament, while I look on the trembling rays of the bright stars, or on this light of day; but like the nightingale, slayer of her offspring, I will wail without ceasing, and cry aloud to all, here, at the doors of my father.

O home of Hades and Persephone! O Hermes of the shades! O potent Curse, and ye, dread daughters of the gods, Erinyes,—ye who behold when a life is reft by violence, when a bed is dishonoured by stealth,—come, help me, avenge the murder of my sire,—and send to me my brother; for I have no more the strength to bear up alone against the load of grief that weighs me down.

(*As* ELECTRA *finishes her lament, the* CHORUS OF WOMEN OF MYCENAE *enter. The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Ah, Electra, child of a wretched mother, why art thou ever pining thus in ceaseless lament for Agamemnon, who long ago was wickedly ensnared by thy false mother's wiles, and betrayed to death by a dastardly hand? Perish the author of that deed, if I may utter such a prayer!

ELECTRA

Ah, noble-hearted maidens, ye have come to soothe my woes. I know and feel it, it escapes me not; but I cannot leave this task undone, or cease from mourning for my hapless sire. Ah, friends whose love responds to mine in every mood, leave me to rave thus,—oh leave me, I entreat you!

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

But never by laments or prayers shalt thou recall thy sire from that lake of Hades to which all must pass. Nay, thine is a fatal course of grief, passing ever from due bounds into a cureless sorrow; wherein there is no deliverance from evils. Say, wherefore art thou enamoured of misery?

ELECTRA

Foolish is the child who forgets a parent's piteous death. No, dearer to my soul is the mourner that laments for Itys, Itys, evermore, that bird distraught with grief, the messenger of Zeus. Ah, queen of sorrow, Niobe, thee I deem divine,—thee, who evermore weepest in thy rocky tomb!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Not to thee alone of mortals, my daughter, hath come any sorrow which thou bearest less calmly than those within, thy kinswomen and sisters, Chrysothemis and Iphianassa,[1] who still live,—as he, too, lives, sorrowing in a secluded youth, yet happy in that this famous realm of Mycenae shall one day welcome him to his heritage, when the kindly guidance of Zeus shall have brought him to this land,—Orestes.

ELECTRA

Yes, I wait for him with unwearied longing, as I move on my sad path from day to day, unwed and childless, bathed in tears, bearing that endless doom of woe; but he forgets all that he has suffered and heard. What message comes to me, that is not belied? He is ever yearning to be with us, but, though he yearns, he never resolves.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Courage, my daughter, courage; great still in heaven is Zeus, who sees and governs all: leave thy bitter quarrel to him; forget not thy foes, but refrain from excess of wrath against them; for Time is a god who makes rough ways smooth. Not heedless is the son of Agamemnon, who dwells by Crisa's pastoral shore; not heedless is the god who reigns by Acheron.

ELECTRA

Nay, the best part of life hath passed away from me in hopelessness, and I have no strength left; I, who am pining away without children,—whom no loving champion shields,—but, like some de-

spised alien, I serve in the halls of my father, clad in this mean garb, and standing at a meagre board.

CHORUS

strophe 3

Piteous was the voice heard at his return, and piteous, as thy sire lay on the festal couch, when the straight, swift blow was dealt him with the blade of bronze. Guile was the plotter, Lust the slayer, dread parents of a dreadful shape; whether it was mortal that wrought therein, or god.

ELECTRA

O that bitter day, bitter beyond all that have come to me; O that night, O the horrors of that unutterable feast, the ruthless death-strokes that my father saw from the hands of twain, who took my life captive by treachery, who doomed me to woe! May the great god of Olympus give them sufferings in requital, and never may their splendour bring them joy, who have done such deeds!

CHORUS

antistrophe 3

Be advised to say no more; canst thou not see what conduct it is which already plunges thee so cruelly in self-made miseries? Thou hast greatly aggravated thy troubles, ever breeding wars with thy sullen soul; but such strife should not be pushed to a conflict with the strong.

ELECTRA

I have been forced to it,—forced by dread causes; I know my own passion, it escapes me not; but, seeing that the causes are so dire, I will never curb these frenzied plaints, while life is in me. Who indeed, ye kindly sisterhood, who that thinks aright, would deem that any word of solace could avail me? Forbear, forbear, my comforters! Such ills must be numbered with those which have no cure; I can never know a respite from my sorrows, or a limit to this wailing.

CHORUS

epode

At least it is in love, like a true-hearted mother, that I dissuade thee from adding misery to miseries.

ELECTRA

But what measure is there in my wretchedness? Say, how can it be right to neglect the dead? Was that impiety ever born in mortal? Never may I have praise of such; never, when my lot is cast

in pleasant places, may I cling to selfish ease, or dishonour my sire by restraining the wings of shrill lamentation!

For if the hapless dead is to lie in dust and nothingness, while the slayers pay not with blood for blood, all regard for man, all fear of heaven, will vanish from the earth.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I came, my child, in zeal for thy welfare no less than for mine own; but if I speak not well, then be it as thou wilt; for we will follow thee.

ELECTRA

I am ashamed, my friends, if ye deem me too impatient for my oft complaining; but, since a hard constraint forces me to this, bear with me. How indeed could any woman of noble nature refrain, who saw the calamities of a father's house, as I see them by day and night continually, not fading, but in the summer of their strength? I, who, first, from the mother that bore me have found bitter enmity; next, in mine own home I dwell with my father's murderers; they rule over me, and with them it rests to give or to withhold what I need.

And then think what manner of days I pass, when I see Aegisthus sitting on my father's throne, wearing the robes which he wore, and pouring libations at the hearth where he slew my sire; and when I see the outrage that crowns all, the murderer in our father's bed at our wretched mother's side, if mother she should be called, who is his wife; but so hardened is she that she lives with that accursed one, fearing no Erinys; nay, as if exulting in her deeds, having found the day on which she treacherously slew my father of old, she keeps it with dance and song, and month by month sacrifices sheep to the gods who have wrought her deliverance.

But I, hapless one, beholding it, weep and pine in the house, and bewail the unholy feast named after my sire,—weep to myself alone; since I may not even indulge my grief to the full measure of my yearning. For this woman, in professions so noble, loudly upbraids me with such taunts as these: 'Impious and hateful girl, hast thou alone lost a father, and is there no other mourner in the world? An evil doom be thine, and may the gods infernal give thee no riddance from thy present laments.'

Thus she insults; save when any one brings her word that Orestes is coming: then, infuriated, she comes up to me, and cries;—'Hast not *thou* brought this upon me? Is not this deed thine, who didst steal Orestes from my hands, and privily convey him forth? Yet be sure that thou shalt have thy due reward.' So she shrieks; and, aiding her, the renowned spouse at her side is vehement in the same strain,—that abject dastard, that utter pest, who fights his battles with the help of women. But I, looking

ever for Orestes to come and end these woes, languish in my misery. Always intending to strike a blow, he has worn out every hope that I could conceive. In such a case, then, friends, there is no room for moderation or for reverence; in sooth, the stress of ills leaves no choice but to follow evil ways.

LEADER

Say, is Aegisthus near while thou speakest thus, or absent from home?

ELECTRA

Absent, certainly; do not think that I should have come to the doors, if he had been near; but just now he is afield.

LEADER

Might I converse with thee more freely, if this is so?

ELECTRA

He is not here, so put thy question; what wouldst thou?

LEADER

I ask thee, then, what sayest thou of thy brother? Will he come soon, or is he delaying? I fain would know.

ELECTRA

He promises to come; but he never fulfils the promise.

LEADER

Yea, a man will pause on the verge of a great work.

ELECTRA

And yet I saved *him* without pausing.

LEADER

Courage; he is too noble to fail his friends.

ELECTRA

I believe it; or I should not have lived so long.

LEADER

Say no more now; for I see thy sister coming from the house, Chrysothemis, daughter of the same sire and mother, with sepulchral gifts in her hands, such as are given to those in the world below.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS *enters from the palace. She is richly dressed.*)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Why, sister, hast thou come forth once more to declaim thus at the public doors? Why wilt thou not learn with any lapse of time to desist

from vain indulgence of idle wrath? Yet this I know,—that I myself am grieved at our plight; indeed, could I find the strength, I would show what love I bear them. But now, in these troubled waters, 'tis best, methinks, to shorten sail; I care not to seem active, without the power to hurt. And would that thine own conduct were the same! Nevertheless, right is on the side of thy choice, not of that which I advise; but if I am to live in freedom, our rulers must be obeyed in all things.

ELECTRA

Strange indeed, that thou, the daughter of such a sire as thine, shouldst forget him, and think only of thy mother! All thy admonitions to me have been taught by her; no word is thine own. Then take thy choice,—to be imprudent; or prudent, but forgetful of thy friends: thou, who hast just said that, couldst thou find the strength, thou wouldst show thy hatred of them; yet, when I am doing my utmost to avenge my sire, thou givest no aid, but seekest to turn thy sister from her deed.

Does not this crown our miseries with cowardice? For tell me,—or let me tell thee,—what I should gain by ceasing from these laments? Do I not live?—miserably, I know, yet well enough for me. And I vex *them,* thus rendering honour to the dead, if pleasure can be felt in that world. But thou, who tellest me of thy hatred, hatest in word alone, while in deeds thou art with the slayers of thy sire. I, then, would never yield to them, though I were promised the gifts which now make thee proud; thine be the richly-spread table and the life of luxury. For me, be it food enough that I do not wound mine own conscience; I covet not such privilege as thine,—nor wouldst thou, wert thou wise. But now, when thou mightest be called daughter of the noblest father among men, be called the child of thy mother; so shall thy baseness be most widely seen, in betrayal of thy dead sire and of thy kindred.

LEADER

No angry word, I entreat! For both of you there is good in what is urged,—if thou, Electra, wouldst learn to profit by her counsel, and she, again, by thine.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

For my part, friends, I am not wholly unused to her discourse; nor should I have touched upon this theme, had I not heard that she was threatened with a dread doom, which shall restrain her from her long-drawn laments.

ELECTRA

Come, declare it then, this terror! If thou canst tell me of aught worse than my present lot, I will resist no more.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Indeed, I will tell thee all that I know. They purpose, if thou wilt not cease from these laments, to send thee where thou shalt never look upon the sunlight, but pass thy days in a dungeon beyond the borders of this land, there to chant thy dreary strain. Bethink thee, then, and do not blame me hereafter, when the blow hath fallen; now is the time to be wise.

ELECTRA

Have they indeed resolved to treat me thus?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Assuredly, whenever Aegisthus comes home.

ELECTRA

If that be all, then may he arrive with speed!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Misguided one! what dire prayer is this?

ELECTRA

That he may come, if he hath any such intent.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

That thou mayst suffer—what? Where are thy wits?

ELECTRA

That I may fly as far as may be from you all.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

But hast thou no care for thy present life?

ELECTRA

Aye, my life is marvellously fair.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

It might be, couldst thou only learn prudence.

ELECTRA

Do not teach me to betray my friends.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I do not,—but to bend before the strong.

ELECTRA

Thine be such flattery: those are not my ways.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
'Tis well, however, not to fall by folly.

ELECTRA
I will fall, if need be, in the cause of my sire.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
But our father, I know, pardons me for this.

ELECTRA
It is for cowards to find peace in such maxims.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
So thou wilt not hearken, and take my counsel?

ELECTRA
No, verily; long may be it before I am so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Then I will go forth upon mine errand.

ELECTRA
And whither goest thou? To whom bearest thou these offerings?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Our mother sends me with funeral libations for our sire.

ELECTRA
How sayest thou? For her deadliest foe?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Slain by her own hand—so thou wouldest say.

ELECTRA
What friend hath persuaded her? Whose wish was this?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
The cause, I think, was some dread vision of the night.

ELECTRA
Gods of our house! be ye with me—now at last!

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Dost thou find any encouragement in this terror?

ELECTRA
If thou wouldst tell me the vision, then I could answer.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, I can tell but little of the story.

ELECTRA

Tell what thou canst; a little word hath often marred, or made, men's fortunes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

'Tis said that she beheld our sire, restored to the sunlight, at her side once more; then he took the sceptre,—once his own, but now borne by Aegisthus,—and planted it at the hearth; and thence a fruitful bough sprang upward, wherewith the whole land of Mycenae was overshadowed. Such was the tale that I heard told by one who was present when she declared her dream to the Sun-god. More than this I know not,—save that she sent me by reason of that fear. So by the gods of our house I beseech thee, hearken to me, and be not ruined by folly! For if thou repel me now, thou wilt come back to seek me in thy trouble.

ELECTRA

Nay, dear sister, let none of these things in thy hands touch the tomb; for neither custom nor piety allows thee to dedicate gifts or bring libations to our sire from a hateful wife. No—to the winds with them! or bury them deep in the earth, where none of them shall ever come near his place of rest; but, when she dies, let her find these treasures laid up for her below.

And were she not the most hardened of all women, she would never have sought to pour these offerings of enmity on the grave of him whom she slew. Think now if it is likely that the dead in the tomb should take these honours kindly at her hand, who ruthlessly slew him, like a foeman, and mangled him, and, for ablution, wiped off the blood-stains on his head? Canst thou believe that these things which thou bringest will absolve her of the murder?

It is not possible. No, cast these things aside; give him rather a lock cut from thine own tresses, and on my part, hapless that I am,—scant gifts these, but my best,—this hair, not glossy with unguents, and this girdle, decked with no rich ornament. Then fall down and pray that he himself may come in kindness from the world below, to aid us against our foes; and that the young Orestes may live to set his foot upon his foes in victorious might, that henceforth we may crown our father's tomb with wealthier hands than those which grace it now.

I think, indeed, I think that he also had some part in sending her these appalling dreams; still, sister, do this service, to help thyself, and me, and him, that most beloved of all men, who rests in the realm of Hades, thy sire and mine.

LEADER

The maiden counsels piously; and thou, friend, wilt do her bidding, if thou art wise.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will. When a duty is clear, reason forbids that two voices should contend, and claims the hastening of the deed. Only, when I attempt this task, aid me with your silence, I entreat you, my friends; for, should my mother hear of it, methinks I shall yet have cause to rue my venture. (CHRYSOTHEMIS *departs, to take the offerings to Agamemnon's grave.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

If I am not an erring seer and one who fails in wisdom, Justice, that hath sent the presage, will come, triumphant in her righteous strength,—will come ere long, my child, to avenge. There is courage in my heart, through those new tidings of the dream that breathes comfort. Not forgetful is thy sire, the lord of Hellas; not forgetful is the two-edged axe of bronze that struck the blow of old, and slew him with foul cruelty.

antistrophe

The Erinys of untiring feet, who is lurking in her dread ambush, will come, as with the march and with the might of a great host. For wicked ones have been fired with passion that hurried them to a forbidden bed, to accursed bridals, to a marriage stained with guilt of blood. Therefore am I sure that the portent will not fail to bring woe upon the partners in crime. Verily mortals cannot read the future in fearful dreams or oracles, if this vision of the night find not due fulfilment.

epode

O chariot-race of Pelops long ago, source of many a sorrow, what weary troubles hast thou brought upon this land! For since Myrtilus sank to rest beneath the waves, when a fatal and cruel hand hurled him to destruction out of the golden car, this house was never yet free from misery and violence.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *enters from the palace.*)

CLYTEMNESTRA

At large once more, it seems, thou rangest,—for Aegisthus is not here, who always kept thee at least from passing the gates, to shame thy friends. But now, since he is absent, thou takest no heed of me; though

thou hast said of me oft-times, and to many, that I am a bold and lawless tyrant, who insults thee and thine. I am guilty of no insolence; I do but return the taunts that I often hear from thee.

Thy father—this is thy constant pretext—was slain by me. Yes, by me—I know it well; it admits of no denial; for Justice slew him, and not I alone,—Justice, whom it became thee to support, hadst thou been right-minded; seeing that this father of thine, whom thou art ever lamenting, was the one man of the Greeks who had the heart to sacrifice thy sister to the gods—he, the father, who had not shared the mother's pangs.

Come, tell me now, wherefore, or to please whom, did he sacrifice her? To please the Argives, thou wilt say? Nay, they had no right to slay my daughter. Or if, forsooth, it was to screen his brother Menelaus that he slew my child, was he not to pay me the penalty for that? Had not Menelaus two children, who should in fairness have been taken before my daughter, as sprung from the sire and mother who had caused that voyage? Or had Hades some strange desire to feast on my offspring, rather than on hers? Or had that accursèd father lost all tenderness for the children of my womb, while he was tender to the children of Menelaus? Was not that the part of a callous and perverse parent? I think so, though I differ from thy judgment; and so would say the dead, if she could speak. For myself, then, I view the past without dismay; but if thou deemest me perverse, see that thine own judgment is just, before thou blame thy neighbour.

ELECTRA

This time thou canst not say that I have done anything to provoke such words from thee. But, if thou wilt give me leave, I fain would declare the truth, in the cause alike of my dead sire and of my sister.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Indeed, thou hast my leave; and didst thou always address me in such a tone, thou wouldst be heard without pain.

ELECTRA

Then I will speak. Thou sayest that thou hast slain my father. What word could bring thee deeper shame than that, whether the deed was just or not? But I must tell thee that thy deed was not just; no, thou wert drawn on to it by the wooing of the base man who is now thy spouse.

Ask the huntress Artemis what sin she punished when she stayed the frequent winds at Aulis; or I will tell thee; for we may not learn from her. My father—so I have heard—was once disporting himself in the grove of the goddess, when his footfall startled a dappled and antlered stag; he shot it, and chanced to utter a certain boast concerning its slaughter. Wroth thereat, the daughter of Leto detained the Greeks, that, in

quittance for the wild creature's life, my father should yield up the life of his own child. Thus it befell that she was sacrificed; since the fleet had no other release, homeward or to Troy; and for that cause, under sore constraint and with sore reluctance, at last he slew her—not for the sake of Menelaus.

But grant—for I will take thine own plea—grant that the motive of his deed was to benefit his brother;—was that a reason for his dying by thy hand? Under what law? See that, in making such a law for men, thou make not trouble and remorse for thyself; for, if we are to take blood for blood, thou wouldst be the first to die, didst thou meet with thy desert.

But look if thy pretext is not false. For tell me, if thou wilt, wherefore thou art now doing the most shameless deeds of all,—dwelling as wife with that blood-guilty one, who first helped thee to slay my sire, and bearing children to him, while thou hast cast out the earlier-born, the stainless offspring of a stainless marriage. How can I praise these things? Or wilt thou say that this, too, is thy vengeance for thy daughter? Nay, a shameful plea, if so thou plead; 'tis not well to wed an enemy for a daughter's sake.

But indeed I may not even counsel thee,—who shriekest that I revile my mother; and truly I think that to me thou art less a mother than a mistress; so wretched is the life that I live, ever beset with miseries by thee and by thy partner. And that other, who scarce escaped thy hand, the hapless Orestes, is wearing out his ill-starred days in exile. Often hast thou charged me with rearing him to punish thy crime; and I would have done so, if I could, thou mayst be sure:—for that matter, denounce me to all, as disloyal, if thou wilt, or petulant, or impudent; for if I am accomplished in such ways, methinks I am no unworthy child of thee.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I see that she breathes forth anger; but whether justice be with her, for this she seems to care no longer.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*to the* CHORUS)

And what manner of care do I need to use against her, who hath thus insulted a mother, and this at her ripe age? Thinkest thou not that she would go forward to any deed, without shame?

ELECTRA

Now be assured that I do feel shame for this, though thou believe it not; I know that my behaviour is unseemly, and becomes me ill. But then the enmity on thy part, and thy treatment, compel me in mine own despite to do thus; for base deeds are taught by base.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thou brazen one! Truly I and my sayings and my deeds give thee too much matter for words.

ELECTRA

The words are thine, not mine; for thine is the action; and the acts find the utterance.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now by our lady Artemis, thou shalt not fail to pay for this boldness, so soon as Aegisthus returns.

ELECTRA

Lo, thou art transported by anger, after granting me free speech, and hast no patience to listen.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Now wilt thou not hush thy clamour, or even suffer me to sacrifice, when I have permitted *thee* to speak unchecked?

ELECTRA

I hinder not,—begin thy rites, I pray thee; and blame not my voice, for I shall say no more.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Raise then, my handmaid, the offerings of many fruits, that I may uplift my prayers to this our king, for deliverance from my present fears. Lend now a gracious ear, O Phoebus our defender, to my words, though they be dark; for I speak not among friends, nor is it meet to unfold my whole thought to the light, while *she* stands near me, lest with her malice and her garrulous cry she spread some rash rumour throughout the town: but hear me thus, since on this wise I must speak.

That vision which I saw last night in doubtful dreams—if it hath come for my good, grant, Lycean king, that it be fulfilled; but if for harm, then let it recoil upon my foes. And if any are plotting to hurl me by treachery from the high estate which now is mine, permit them not; rather vouchsafe that, still living thus unscathed, I may bear sway over the house of the Atreidae and this realm, sharing prosperous days with the friends who share them now, and with those of my children from whom no enmity or bitterness pursues me.

O Lycean Apollo, graciously hear these prayers, and grant them to us all, even as we ask! For the rest, though I be silent, I deem that thou, a god, must know it; all things, surely, are seen by the sons of Zeus.

(*The* PAEDAGOGUS *enters.*)

PAEDAGOGUS

Ladies, might a stranger crave to know if this be the palace of the king Aegisthus?

LEADER

It is, sir; thou thyself hast guessed aright.

PAEDAGOGUS

And am I right in surmising that this lady is his consort? She is of queenly aspect.

LEADER

Assuredly: thou art in the presence of the queen.

PAEDAGOGUS

Hail, royal lady! I bring glad tidings to thee and to Aegisthus, from a friend.

CLYTEMNESTRA

I welcome the omen; but I would fain know from thee, first, who may have sent thee.

PAEDAGOGUS

Phanoteus the Phocian, on a weighty mission.

CLYTEMNESTRA

What is it, sir? Tell me: coming from a friend, thou wilt bring, I know, a kindly message.

PAEDAGOGUS

Orestes is dead; that is the sum.

ELECTRA

Oh, miserable that I am! I am lost this day!

CLYTEMNESTRA

What sayest thou, friend, what sayest thou?—listen not to her!

PAEDAGOGUS

I said, and say again—Orestes is dead.

ELECTRA

I am lost, hapless one, I am undone!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*to* ELECTRA)

See thou to thine own concerns.—But do thou, sir, tell me exactly,—how did he perish?

PAEDAGOGUS

I was sent for that purpose, and will tell thee all. Having gone to the renowned festival, the pride of Greece, for the Delphian games, when he heard the loud summons to the foot-race which was first to be decided, he entered the lists, a brilliant form, a wonder in the eyes of all there; and, having finished his course at the point where it began, he went out with the glorious meed of victory. To speak briefly, where there is much to tell, I know not the man whose deeds and triumphs have matched his; but one thing thou must know; in all the contests that the judges announced, he bore away the prize; and men deemed him happy, as oft as the herald proclaimed him an Argive, by name Orestes, son of Agamemnon, who once gathered the famous armament of Greece.

Thus far, 'twas well; but, when a god sends harm, not even the strong man can escape. For, on another day, when chariots were to try their speed at sunrise, he entered, with many charioteers. One was an Achaean, one from Sparta, two masters of yoked cars were Libyans; Orestes, driving Thessalian mares, came fifth among them; the sixth from Aetolia, with chestnut colts; a Magnesian was the seventh; the eighth, with white horses, was of Aenian stock; the ninth, from Athens, built of gods; there was a Boeotian too, making the tenth chariot.

They took their stations where the appointed umpires placed them by lot and ranged the cars; then, at the sound of the brazen trump, they started. All shouted to their horses, and shook the reins in their hands; the whole course was filled with the noise of rattling chariots; the dust flew upward; and all, in a confused throng, plied their goads unsparingly, each of them striving to pass the wheels and the snorting steeds of his rivals; for alike at their backs and at their rolling wheels the breath of the horses foamed and smote.

Orestes, driving close to the pillar at either end of the course, almost grazed it with his wheel each time, and, giving rein to the trace-horse on the right, checked the horse on the inner side. Hitherto, all the chariots had escaped overthrow; but presently the Aenian's hard-mouthed colts ran away, and, swerving, as they passed from the sixth into the seventh round, dashed their foreheads against the team of the Barcaean. Other mishaps followed the first, shock on shock and crash on crash, till the whole race-ground of Crisa was strewn with the wreck of the chariots.

Seeing this, the wary charioteer from Athens drew aside and paused, allowing the billow of chariots, surging in mid course, to go by. Orestes was driving last, keeping his horses behind,—for his trust was in the end; but when he saw that the Athenian was alone left in, he sent a shrill cry ringing through the ears of his swift colts, and gave chase. Team was brought level with team, and so they raced,—first one man, then the other, showing his head in front of the chariots.

Hitherto the ill-fated Orestes had passed safely through every round, steadfast in his steadfast car; at last, slackening his left rein while the horse was turning, unawares he struck the edge of the pillar; he broke the axle-box in twain; he was thrown over the chariot-rail; he was caught in the shapely reins; and, as he fell on the ground, his colts were scattered into the middle of the course.

But when the people saw him fallen from the car, a cry of pity went up for the youth, who had done such deeds and was meeting such a doom, —now dashed to earth, now tossed feet uppermost to the sky,—till the charioteers, with difficulty checking the career of his horses, loosed him, so covered with blood that no friend who saw it would have known the hapless corpse. Straightway they burned it on a pyre; and chosen men of Phocis are bringing in a small urn of bronze the sad dust of that mighty form, to find due burial in his fatherland.

Such is my story,—grievous to hear, if words can grieve; but for us, who beheld, the greatest of sorrows that these eyes have seen.

LEADER

Alas, alas! Now, methinks, the stock of our ancient masters hath utterly perished, root and branch.

CLYTEMNESTRA

O Zeus, what shall I call these tidings,—glad tidings? Or dire, but gainful? 'Tis a bitter lot, when mine own calamities make the safety of my life.

PAEDAGOGUS

Why art thou so downcast, lady, at this news?

CLYTEMNESTRA

There is a strange power in motherhood; a mother may be wronged, but she never learns to hate her child.

PAEDAGOGUS

Then it seems that we have come in vain.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Nay, not in vain; how canst thou say 'in vain,' when thou hast brought me sure proofs of his death?—His, who sprang from mine own life, yet, forsaking me who had suckled and reared him, became an exile and an alien; and, after he went out of this land, he saw me no more; but, charging me with the murder of his sire, he uttered dread threats against me; so that neither by night nor by day could sweet sleep cover mine eyes, but from moment to moment I lived in fear of death. Now, however—since this day I am rid of terror from him, and from this girl,—that worse

plague who shared my home, while still she drained my very life-blood,—now, methinks, for aught that she can threaten, I shall pass my days in peace.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! Now, indeed, Orestes, thy fortune may be lamented, when it is thus with thee, and thou art mocked by this thy mother! Is it not well?

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not with thee; but his state is well.

ELECTRA

Hear, Nemesis of him who hath lately died!

CLYTEMNESTRA

She hath heard who should be heard, and hath ordained well.

ELECTRA

Insult us, for this is the time of thy triumph.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Then will not Orestes and thou silence me?

ELECTRA

We are silenced; much less should we silence thee.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Thy coming, sir, would deserve large recompense, if thou hast hushed her clamorous tongue.

PAEDAGOGUS

Then I may take my leave, if all is well.

CLYTEMNESTRA

Not so; thy welcome would then be unworthy of me, and of the ally who sent thee. Nay, come thou in; and leave her without, to make loud lament for herself and for her friends.

(CLYTEMNESTRA *and the* PAEDAGOGUS *enter the palace.*)

ELECTRA

How think ye? Was there not grief and anguish there, wondrous weeping and wailing of that miserable mother, for the son who perished by such a fate? Nay, she left us with a laugh! Ah, woe is me! Dearest Orestes, how is my life quenched by thy death! Thou hast torn away with thee from my heart the only hopes which still were mine,—that thou wouldst live to return some day, an avenger of thy sire, and of me unhappy. But now—whither shall I turn? I am alone, bereft of thee, as of my father.

Henceforth I must be a slave again among those whom most I hate, my father's murderers. Is it not well with me? But never, at least, henceforward, will I enter the house to dwell with them; nay, at these gates I will lay me down, and here, without a friend, my days shall wither. Therefore, if any in the house be wroth, let them slay me; for 'tis a grace, if I die, but if I live, a pain; I desire life no more.

(*The following lines between* ELECTRA *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Where are the thunderbolts of Zeus, or where is the bright Sun, if they look upon these things, and brand them not, but rest?

ELECTRA

Woe, woe, ah me, ah me!

CHORUS

O daughter, why weepest thou?

ELECTRA (*with hands outstretched to heaven*)

Alas!

CHORUS

Utter no rash cry!

ELECTRA

Thou wilt break my heart!

CHORUS

How meanest thou?

ELECTRA

If thou suggest a hope concerning those who have surely passed to the realm below, thou wilt trample yet more upon my misery.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Nay, I know how, ensnared by a woman for a chain of gold, the prince Amphiaraus found a grave; and now beneath the earth—

ELECTRA

Ah me, ah me!

CHORUS

—he reigns in fulness of force.

ELECTRA

Alas!

CHORUS

Alas indeed! for the murderess—

ELECTRA

Was slain.

CHORUS

Yea.

ELECTRA

I know it, I know it; for a champion arose to avenge the mourning dead; but to me no champion remains; for he who yet was left hath been snatched away.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Hapless art thou, and hapless is thy lot!

ELECTRA

Well know I that, too well,—I, whose life is a torrent of woes dread and dark, a torrent that surges through all the months!

CHORUS

We have seen the course of thy sorrow.

ELECTRA

Cease, then, to divert me from it, when no more—

CHORUS

How sayest thou?

ELECTRA

—when no more can I have the comfort of hope from a brother, the seed of the same noble sire.

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

For all men it is appointed to die.

ELECTRA

What, to die as that ill-starred one died, amid the tramp of racing steeds, entangled in the reins that dragged him?

CHORUS

Cruel was his doom, beyond thought!

ELECTRA

Yea, surely; when in foreign soil, without ministry of my hands—

CHORUS

Alas!

ELECTRA

—he is buried, ungraced by me with sepulture or with tears.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS *enters in excitement.*)

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Joy wings my feet, dear sister, not careful of seemliness, if I come with speed; for I bring joyful news, to relieve thy long sufferings and sorrows.

ELECTRA

And whence couldst *thou* find help for my woes, whereof no cure can be imagined?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Orestes is with us,—know this from my lips,—in living presence, as surely as thou seest me here.

ELECTRA

What, art thou mad, poor girl? Art thou laughing at my sorrows, and thine own?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, by our father's hearth, I speak not in mockery; I tell thee that he is with us indeed.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! And from whom hast thou heard this tale, which thou believest so lightly?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I believe it on mine own knowledge, not on hearsay; I have seen clear proofs.

ELECTRA

What hast thou seen, poor girl, to warrant thy belief? Whither, I wonder hast thou turned thine eyes, that thou art fevered with this baneful fire?

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then, for the gods' love, listen, that thou mayest know my story, before deciding whether I am sane or foolish.

ELECTRA

Speak on, then, if thou findest pleasure in speaking.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Well, thou shalt hear all that I have seen. When I came to our father's ancient tomb, I saw that streams of milk had lately flowed from the top of the mound, and that his sepulchre was encircled with garlands of all flowers that blow. I was astonished at the sight, and peered about, lest haply some one should be close to my side. But when I perceived that all the place was in stillness, I crept nearer to the tomb; and on the mound's edge I saw a lock of hair, freshly severed.

And the moment that I saw it, ah me, a familiar image rushed upon my soul, telling me that there I beheld a token of him whom most I love, Orestes. Then I took it in my hands, and uttered no ill-omened word, but the tears of joy straightway filled mine eyes. And I know well, as I knew then, that this fair tribute has come from none but him. Whose part else was that, save mine and thine? And I did it not, I know,—nor thou; how shouldst thou?—when thou canst not leave this house, even to worship the gods, but at thy peril. Nor, again, does our mother's heart incline to do such deeds, nor could she have so done without our knowledge.

No, these offerings are from Orestes! Come, dear sister, courage! No mortal life is attended by a changeless fortune. Ours was once gloomy; but this day, perchance, will seal the promise of much good.

ELECTRA

Alas for thy folly! How I have been pitying thee!

CHRYSOTHEMIS

What, are not my tidings welcome?

ELECTRA

Thou knowest not whither or into what dreams thou wanderest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Should I not know what mine own eyes have seen?

ELECTRA

He is dead, poor girl; and thy hopes in that deliverer are gone: look not to him.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Woe, woe is me! From whom hast thou heard this?

ELECTRA

From the man who was present when he perished.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

And where is he? Wonder steals over my mind.

ELECTRA

He is within, a guest not unpleasing to our mother.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Ah, woe is me! Whose, then, can have been those ample offerings to our father's tomb?

ELECTRA

Most likely, I think, some one brought those gifts in memory of the dead Orestes.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Oh, hapless that I am! And I was bringing such news in joyous haste, ignorant, it seems, how dire was our plight; but now that I have come, I find fresh sorrows added to the old!

ELECTRA

So stands thy case; yet, if thou wilt hearken to me, thou wilt lighten the load of our present trouble.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Can I ever raise the dead to life?

ELECTRA

I meant not that; I am not so foolish.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

What biddest thou, then, for which my strength avails?

ELECTRA

That thou be brave in doing what I enjoin.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, if any good can be done, I will not refuse.

ELECTRA

Remember, nothing succeeds without toil.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I know it, and will share thy burden with all my power.

ELECTRA

Hear, then, how I am resolved to act. As for the support of friends, thou thyself must know that we have none; Hades hath taken our friends away, and we two are left alone. I, so long as I heard that my brother

still lived and prospered, had hopes that he would yet come to avenge the murder of our sire. But now that he is no more, I look next to thee, not to flinch from aiding me thy sister to slay our father's murderer, Aegisthus:—I must have no secret from thee more.

How long art thou to wait inactive? What hope is left standing, to which thine eyes can turn? Thou hast to complain that thou art robbed of thy father's heritage; thou hast to mourn that thus far thy life is fading without nuptial song or wedded love. Nay, and do not hope that such joys will ever be thine; Aegisthus is not so ill-advised as ever to permit that children should spring from thee or me for his own sure destruction. But if thou wilt follow my counsels, first thou wilt win praise of piety from our dead sire below, and from our brother too; next, thou shalt be called free henceforth, as thou wert born, and shalt find worthy bridals; for noble natures draw the gaze of all.

Then seest thou not what fair fame thou wilt win for thyself and for me, by hearkening to my word? What citizen or stranger, when he sees us, will not greet us with praises such as these?—'Behold these two sisters, my friends, who saved their father's house; who, when their foes were firmly planted of yore, took their lives in their hands and stood forth as avengers of blood! Worthy of love are these twain, worthy of reverence from all; at festivals, and wherever the folk are assembled, let these be honoured of all men for their prowess.' Thus will every one speak of us, so that in life and in death our glory shall not fail.

Come, dear sister, hearken! Work with thy sire, share the burden of thy brother, win rest from woes for me and for thyself,—mindful of this, that an ignoble life brings shame upon the noble.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

In such case as this, forethought is helpful for those who speak and those who hear.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Yea, and before she spake, my friends, were she blest with a sound mind, she would have remembered caution, as she doth not remember it.

Now whither canst thou have turned thine eyes, that thou art arming thyself with such rashness, and calling me to aid thee? Seest thou not, thou art a woman, not a man, and no match for thine adversaries in strength? And their fortune prospers day by day, while ours is ebbing and coming to nought. Who, then, plotting to vanquish a foe so strong, shall escape without suffering deadly scathe? See that we change not our evil plight to worse, if any one hears these words. It brings us no relief or benefit, if, after winning fair fame, we die an ignominious death; for mere death is not the bitterest, but rather when one who craves to die cannot obtain even that boon.

Nay, I beseech thee, before we are utterly destroyed, and leave our house desolate, restrain thy rage! I will take care that thy words remain secret and harmless; and learn thou the prudence, at last though late, of yielding, when so helpless, to thy rulers.

LEADER

Hearken; there is no better gain for mortals to win than foresight and a prudent mind.

ELECTRA

Thou hast said nothing unlooked-for; I well knew that thou wouldst reject what I proffered. Well! I must do this deed with mine own hand, and alone; for assuredly I will not leave it void.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Alas! Would thou hadst been so purposed on the day of our father's death! What mightst thou not have wrought?

ELECTRA

My nature was the same then, but my mind less ripe.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Strive to keep such a mind through all thy life.

ELECTRA

These counsels mean that thou wilt not share my deed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

No; for the venture is likely to bring disaster.

ELECTRA

I admire thy prudence; thy cowardice I hate.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

I will listen not less calmly when thou praise me.

ELECTRA

Never fear to suffer that from me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Time enough in the future to decide that.

ELECTRA

Begone; there is no power to help in thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Not so; but in thee, no mind to learn.

ELECTRA
Go, declare all this to thy mother!

CHRYSOTHEMIS
But, again, I do not hate thee with such a hate.

ELECTRA
Yet know at least to what dishonour thou bringest me.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Dishonour, no! I am only thinking of thy good.

ELECTRA
Am I bound, then, to follow thy rule of right?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
When thou art wise, then thou shalt be our guide.

ELECTRA
Sad, that one who speaks so well should speak amiss!

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Thou hast well described the fault to which thou cleavest.

ELECTRA
How? Dost thou not think that I speak with justice?

CHRYSOTHEMIS
But sometimes justice itself is fraught with harm.

ELECTRA
I care not to live by such a law.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Well, if thou must do this, thou wilt praise me yet.

ELECTRA
And do it I will, no whit dismayed by thee.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Is this so indeed? Wilt thou not change thy counsels?

ELECTRA
No, for nothing is more hateful than bad counsel.

CHRYSOTHEMIS
Thou seemest to agree with nothing that I urge.

ELECTRA

My resolve is not new, but long since fixed.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Then I will go; thou canst not be brought to approve my words, nor I to commend thy conduct.

ELECTRA

Nay, go within; never will I follow thee, however much thou mayst desire it; it were great folly even to attempt an idle quest.

CHRYSOTHEMIS

Nay, if thou art wise in thine own eyes, be such wisdom thine; by and by, when thou standest in evil plight, thou wilt praise my words.

(CHRYSOTHEMIS *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When we see the birds of the air, with sure instinct, careful to nourish those who give them life and nurture, why do not we pay these debts in like measure? Nay, by the lightning-flash of Zeus, by Themis throned in heaven, it is not long till sin brings sorrow.

Voice that comest to the dead beneath the earth, send a piteous cry, I pray thee, to the son of Atreus in that world, a joyless message of dishonour;

antistrophe 1

tell him that the fortunes of his house are now distempered; while, among his children, strife of sister with sister hath broken the harmony of loving days. Electra, forsaken, braves the storm alone; she bewails alway, hapless one, her father's fate, like the nightingale unwearied in lament; she recks not of death, but is ready to leave the sunlight, could she but quell the two Furies of her house. Who shall match such noble child of noble sire?

strophe 2

No generous soul deigns, by a base life, to cloud a fair repute, and leave a name inglorious; as thou, too, O my daughter, hast chosen to mourn all thy days with those that mourn, and hast spurned dishonour, that thou mightest win at once a twofold praise, as wise, and as the best of daughters.

antistrophe 2

May I yet see thy life raised in might and wealth above thy foes, even as now it is humbled beneath their hand! For I have found thee

in no prosperous estate; and yet, for observance of nature's highest laws, winning the noblest renown, by thy piety towards Zeus.

(ORESTES *enters, with* PYLADES *and two attendants, one of them carrying a funeral urn.*)

ORESTES

Ladies, have we been directed aright, and are we on the right path to our goal?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And what seekest thou? With what desire hast thou come?

ORESTES

I have been searching for the home of Aegisthus.

LEADER

Well, thou hast found it; and thy guide is blameless.

ORESTES

Which of you, then, will tell those within that our company, long desired, hath arrived?

LEADER

This maiden,—if the nearest should announce it.

ORESTES

I pray thee, mistress, make it known in the house that certain men of Phocis seek Aegisthus.

ELECTRA

Ah, woe is me! Surely ye are not bringing the visible proofs of that rumour which we heard?

ORESTES

I know nothing of thy 'rumour'; but the aged Strophius charged me with tidings of Orestes.

ELECTRA

What are they, sir? Ah, how I thrill with fear!

ORESTES

He is dead; and in a small urn, as thou seest, we bring the scanty relics home.

ELECTRA

Ah me unhappy! There, at last, before mine eyes, I see that woful burden in your hands!

ORESTES

If thy tears are for aught which Orestes hath suffered, know that yonder vessel holds his dust.

ELECTRA

Ah, sir, allow me, then, I implore thee, if this urn indeed contains him, to take it in my hands,—that I may weep and wail, not for these ashes alone, but for myself and for all our house therewith!

ORESTES (*to the attendants*)

Bring it and give it her, whoe'er she be; for she who begs this boon must be one who wished him no evil, but a friend, or haply a kinswoman in blood.

(*The urn is placed in* ELECTRA'S *hands.*)

ELECTRA

Ah, memorial of him whom I loved best on earth! Ah, Orestes, whose life hath no relic left save this,—how far from the hopes with which I sent thee forth is the manner in which I receive thee back! Now I carry thy poor dust in my hands; but thou wert radiant, my child, when I sped thee forth from home! Would that I had yielded up my breath, ere, with these hands, I stole thee away, and sent thee to a strange land, and rescued thee from death; that so thou mightest have been stricken down on that self-same day, and had thy portion in the tomb of thy sire!

But now, an exile from home and fatherland, thou hast perished miserably, far from thy sister; woe is me, these loving hands have not washed or decked thy corpse, nor taken up, as was meet, their sad burden from the flaming pyre. No! at the hands of strangers, hapless one, thou hast had those rites, and so art come to us, a little dust in a narrow urn.

Ah, woe is me for my nursing long ago, so vain, that I oft bestowed on thee with loving toil! For thou wast never thy mother's darling so much as mine; nor was any in the house thy nurse but I; and by thee I was ever called 'sister.' But now all this hath vanished in a day, with thy death; like a whirlwind, thou hast swept all away with thee. Our father is gone; I am dead in regard to thee; thou thyself hast perished: our foes exult; that mother, who is none, is mad with joy,—she of whom thou didst oft send me secret messages, thy heralds, saying that thou thyself wouldst appear as an avenger. But our evil fortune, thine and mine, hath reft all that away, and hath sent thee forth unto me thus,—no more the form that I loved so well, but ashes and an idle shade.

Ah me, ah me! O piteous dust! Alas, thou dear one, sent on a dire journey, how hast undone me,—undone me indeed, O brother mine!

Therefore take me to this thy home, me who am as nothing, to thy nothingness, that I may dwell with thee henceforth below; for when thou

wert on earth, we shared alike; and now I fain would die, that I may not be parted from thee in the grave. For I see that the dead have rest from pain.

LEADER

Bethink thee, Electra, thou art the child of mortal sire, and mortal was Orestes; therefore grieve not too much. This is a debt which all of us must pay.

ORESTES

Alas, what shall I say? What words can serve me at this pass? I can restrain my lips no longer!

ELECTRA

What hath troubled thee? Why didst thou say that?

ORESTES

Is this the form of the illustrious Electra that I behold?

ELECTRA

It is; and very grievous is her plight.

ORESTES

Alas, then, for this miserable fortune!

ELECTRA

Surely, sir, thy lament is not for *me*?

ORESTES

O form cruelly, godlessly misused!

ELECTRA

Those ill-omened words, sir, fit no one better than me.

ORESTES

Alas for thy life, unwedded and all unblest!

ELECTRA

Why this steadfast gaze, stranger, and these laments?

ORESTES

How ignorant was I, then, of mine own sorrows!

ELECTRA

By what that hath been said hast thou perceived this?

ORESTES

By seeing thy sufferings, so many and so great.

ELECTRA
And yet thou seest but a few of my woes.

ORESTES
Could any be more painful to behold?

ELECTRA
This, that I share the dwelling of the murderers.

ORESTES
Whose murderers? Where lies the guilt at which thou hintest?

ELECTRA
My father's;—and then I am their slave perforce.

ORESTES
Who is it that subjects thee to this constraint?

ELECTRA
A mother—in name, but no mother in her deeds.

ORESTES
How doth she oppress thee? With violence or with hardship?

ELECTRA
With violence, and hardships, and all manner of ill.

ORESTES
And is there none to succour, or to hinder?

ELECTRA
None. I *had* one; and thou hast shown me his ashes.

ORESTES
Hapless girl, how this sight hath stirred my pity!

ELECTRA
Know, then, that thou art the first who ever pitied me.

ORESTES
No other visitor hath ever shared thy pain.

ELECTRA
Surely thou art not some unknown kinsman?

ORESTES
I would answer, if these were friends who hear us.

ELECTRA

Oh, they are friends; thou canst speak without mistrust.

ORESTES

Give up this urn, then, and thou shalt be told all.

ELECTRA

Nay, I beseech thee be not so cruel to me, sir!

ORESTES

Do as I say, and never fear to do amiss.

ELECTRA

I conjure thee, rob me not of my chief treasure!

ORESTES

Thou must not keep it.

ELECTRA

Ah woe is me for thee, Orestes, if I am not to give thee burial!

ORESTES

Hush!—no such word!—Thou hast no right to lament.

ELECTRA

No right to lament for my dead brother?

ORESTES

It is not meet for thee to speak of him thus.

ELECTRA

Am I so dishonoured of the dead?

ORESTES

Dishonoured of none:—but this is not thy part.

ELECTRA

Yes, if these are the ashes of Orestes that I hold.

ORESTES

They are not; a fiction clothed them with his name.
(*He gently takes the urn from her.*)

ELECTRA

And where is that unhappy one's tomb?

ORESTES

There is none; the living have no tomb.

ELECTRA

What sayest thou, boy?

ORESTES

Nothing that is not true.

ELECTRA

The man is alive?

ORESTES

If there be life in me.

ELECTRA

What? Art thou he?

ORESTES

Look at this signet, once our father's, and judge if I speak truth.

ELECTRA

O blissful day!

ORESTES

Blissful, in very deed!

ELECTRA

Is this thy voice?

ORESTES

Let no other voice reply.

ELECTRA

Do I hold thee in my arms?

ORESTES

As mayest thou hold me always!

ELECTRA

Ah, dear friends and fellow-citizens, behold Orestes here, who was feigned dead, and now, by that feigning hath come safely home!

LEADER

We see him, daughter; and for this happy fortune a tear of joy trickles from our eyes.

(*The following lines between* ORESTES *and* ELECTRA *are chanted responsively.*)

ELECTRA

strophe

Offspring of him whom I loved best, thou hast come even now, thou hast come, and found and seen her whom thy heart desired!

ORESTES

I am with thee;—but keep silence for a while.

ELECTRA

What meanest thou?

ORESTES

'Tis better to be silent, lest some one within should hear.

ELECTRA

Nay, by ever-virgin Artemis, I will never stoop to fear women, stay-at-homes, vain burdens of the ground!

ORESTES

Yet remember that in women, too, dwells the spirit of battle; thou hast had good proof of that, I ween.

ELECTRA

Alas! ah me! Thou hast reminded me of my sorrow, one which, from its nature, cannot be veiled, cannot be done away with, cannot forget!

ORESTES

I know this also; but when occasion prompts, then will be the moment to recall those deeds.

ELECTRA

antistrophe

Each moment of all time, as it comes, would be meet occasion for these my just complaints; scarcely now have I had my lips set free.

ORESTES

I grant it; therefore guard thy freedom.

ELECTRA

What must I do?

ORESTES

When the season serves not, do not wish to speak too much.

ELECTRA

Nay, who could fitly exchange speech for such silence, when thou hast appeared? For now I have seen thy face, beyond all thought and hope!

ORESTES

Thou sawest it, when the gods moved me to come. . . .[2]

ELECTRA

Thou hast told me of a grace above the first, if a god hath indeed brought thee to our house; I acknowledge therein the work of heaven.

ORESTES

I am loth, indeed, to curb thy gladness, but yet this excess of joy moves my fear.

ELECTRA

epode

O thou who, after many a year, hast deigned thus to gladden mine eyes by thy return, do not, now that thou hast seen me in all my woe—

ORESTES

What is thy prayer?

ELECTRA

—do not rob me of the comfort of thy face; do not force me to forego it!

ORESTES

I should be wroth, indeed, if I saw another attempt it.

ELECTRA

My prayer is granted?

ORESTES

Canst thou doubt?

ELECTRA

Ah, friends, I heard a voice that I could never have hoped to hear; nor could I have restrained my emotion in silence, and without a cry, when I heard it.

Ah me! But now I have thee; thou art come to me with the light of that dear countenance, which never, even in sorrow, could I forget.

(*The chant is concluded.*)

ORESTES

Spare all superfluous words; tell me not of our mother's wickedness, or how Aegisthus drains the wealth of our father's house by lavish luxury or aimless waste; for the story would not suffer thee to keep due limit. Tell me rather that which will serve our present need,—where we must show ourselves, or wait in ambush, that this our coming may confound the triumph of our foes.

And look that our mother read not thy secret in thy radiant face, when we twain have advanced into the house, but make lament, as for the feigned disaster; for when we have prospered, then there will be leisure to rejoice and exult in freedom.

ELECTRA

Nay, brother, as it pleases thee, so shall be my conduct also; for all my joy is a gift from thee, and not mine own. Nor would I consent to win a great good for myself at the cost of the least pain to thee; for so should I ill serve the divine power that befriends us now.

But thou knowest how matters stand here, I doubt not: thou must have heard that Aegisthus is from home, but our mother within;—and fear not that she will ever see my face lit up with smiles; for mine old hatred of her hath sunk into my heart; and, since I have beheld thee, for very joy I shall never cease to weep. How indeed should I cease, who have seen thee come home this day, first as dead, and then in life? Strangely hast thou wrought on me; so that, if my father should return alive, I should no longer doubt my senses, but should believe that I saw him. Now, therefore, that thou hast come to me so wondrously, command me as thou wilt; for, had I been alone, I should have achieved one of two things,—a noble deliverance, or a noble death.

ORESTES

Thou hadst best be silent; for I hear some one within preparing to go forth.

ELECTRA (*to* ORESTES *and* PYLADES)

Enter, sirs; especially as ye bring that which no one could repulse from these doors, though he receive it without joy.

(*The* PAEDAGOGUS *enters from the palace.*)

PAEDAGOGUS

Foolish and senseless children! Are ye weary of your lives, or was there no wit born in you, that ye see not how ye stand, not on the brink, but in the very midst of deadly perils? Nay, had I not kept watch this long while at these doors, your plans would have been in the house before yourselves; but, as it is, my care shielded you from that. Now have done with this

long discourse, these insatiate cries of joy, and pass within; for in such deeds delay is evil, and 'tis well to make an end.

ORESTES

What, then, will be my prospects when I enter?

PAEDAGOGUS

Good; for thou art secured from recognition.

ORESTES

Thou hast reported me, I presume, as dead?

PAEDAGOGUS

Know that here thou art numbered with the shades.

ORESTES

Do they rejoice, then, at these tidings? Or what say they?

PAEDAGOGUS

I will tell thee at the end; meanwhile, all is well for us on their part,—even that which is not well.

ELECTRA

Who is this, brother? I pray thee, tell me.

ORESTES

Dost thou not perceive?

ELECTRA

I cannot guess.

ORESTES

Knowest thou not the man to whose hands thou gavest me once?

ELECTRA

What man? How sayest thou?

ORESTES

By whose hands, through thy forethought, I was secretly conveyed forth to Phocian soil.

ELECTRA

Is this he in whom, alone of many, I found a true ally of old, when our sire was slain?

ORESTES

'Tis he; question me no further.

ELECTRA

O joyous day! O sole preserver of Agamemnon's house, how hast thou come? Art thou he indeed, who didst save my brother and myself from many sorrows? O dearest hands; O messenger whose feet were kindly servants! How couldst thou be with me so long, and remain unknown, nor give a ray of light, but afflict me by fables, while possessed of truths most sweet? Hail, father,—for 'tis a father that I seem to behold! All hail, —and know that I have hated thee, and loved thee, in one day, as never man before!

PAEDAGOGUS

Enough, methinks; as for the story of the past, many are the circling nights, and days as many, which shall show it thee, Electra, in its fulness. (*To* ORESTES *and* PYLADES) But this is my counsel to you twain, who stand there—now is the time to act; now Clytemnestra is alone,—no man is now within: but, if ye pause, consider that ye will have to fight, not with the inmates alone, but with other foes more numerous and better skilled.

ORESTES

Pylades, this our task seems no longer to crave many words, but rather that we should enter the house forthwith,—first adoring the shrines of my father's gods, who keep these gates.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter the palace, followed by the* PAEDAGOGUS.— ELECTRA *remains outside.*)

ELECTRA

O King Apollo! graciously hear them, and hear me besides, who so oft have come before thine altar with such gifts as my devout hand could bring! And now, O Lycean Apollo, with such vows as I can make, I pray thee, I supplicate, I implore, grant us thy benignant aid in these designs, and show men how impiety is rewarded by the gods!

(ELECTRA *enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Behold how Ares moves onward, breathing deadly vengeance, against which none may strive!

Even now the pursuers of dark guilt have passed beneath yon roof, the hounds which none may flee. Therefore the vision of my soul shall not long tarry in suspense.

The champion of the spirits infernal is ushered with stealthy feet into the house, the ancestral palace of his sire, bearing keen-edged death in his hands; and Hermes, son of Maia, who hath shrouded the

guile in darkness, leads him forward, even to the end, and delays no more.

(ELECTRA *enters from the palace.*)

ELECTRA

strophe

Ah, dearest friends, in a moment the men will do the deed;—but wait in silence.

CHORUS

How is it?—what do they now?

ELECTRA

She is decking the urn for burial, and those two stand close to her.

CHORUS

And why hast thou sped forth?

ELECTRA

To guard against Aegisthus entering before we are aware.

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

Alas! Woe for the house forsaken of friends and filled with murderers!

ELECTRA

A cry goes up within:—hear ye not, friends?

CHORUS

I heard, ah me, sounds dire to hear, and shuddered!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

O hapless that I am!—Aegisthus, where, where art thou?

ELECTRA

Hark, once more a voice resounds!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

My son, my son, have pity on thy mother!

ELECTRA

Thou hadst none for him, nor for the father that begat him.

CHORUS

Ill-fated realm and race, now the fate that hath pursued thee day by day is dying,—is dying!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

Oh, I am smitten!

ELECTRA

Smite, if thou canst, once more!

CLYTEMNESTRA (*within*)

Ah, woe is me again!

ELECTRA

Would that the woe were for Aegisthus too!

CHORUS

The curses are at work; the buried live; blood flows for blood, drained from the slayers by those who died of yore.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter from the palace.*)

antistrophe

Behold, they come! That red hand reeks with sacrifice to Ares; nor can I blame the deed.

ELECTRA

Orestes, how fare ye?

ORESTES

All is well within the house, if Apollo's oracle spake well.

ELECTRA

The guilty one is dead?

ORESTES

Fear no more that thy proud mother will ever put thee to dishonour.

CHORUS

Cease; for I see Aegisthus full in view.

ELECTRA

Rash boys, back, back!

ORESTES

Where see ye the man?

ELECTRA

Yonder, at our mercy, he advances from the suburb, full of joy.

CHORUS

Make with all speed for the vestibule; that, as your first task prospered, so this again may prosper now.

ORESTES

Fear not,—we will perform it.

ELECTRA

Haste, then, whither thou wouldst.

ORESTES

See, I am gone.

ELECTRA

I will look to matters here.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *go back into the palace.*)

CHORUS

'Twere well to soothe his ear with some few words of seeming gentleness, that he may rush blindly upon the struggle with his doom.

(AEGISTHUS *enters.*)

AEGISTHUS

Which of you can tell me, where are those Phocian strangers, who, 'tis said, have brought us tidings of Orestes slain in the wreck of his chariot? Thee, thee I ask, yes, thee, in former days so bold,—for methinks it touches thee most nearly; thou best must know, and best canst tell.

ELECTRA

I know assuredly; else were I a stranger to the fortune of my nearest kinsfolk.

AEGISTHUS

Where then may be the strangers? Tell me.

ELECTRA

Within; they have found a way to the heart of their hostess.

AEGISTHUS

Have they in truth reported him dead?

ELECTRA

Nay, not reported only; they have shown him.

AEGISTHUS

Can I, then, see the corpse with mine own eyes?

ELECTRA

Thou canst, indeed; and 'tis no enviable sight.

AEGISTHUS

Indeed, thou hast given me a joyful greeting, beyond thy wont.

ELECTRA

Joy be thine, if in these things thou findest joy.

AEGISTHUS

Silence, I say, and throw wide the gates, for all Mycenaeans and Argives to behold; that, if any of them were once buoyed on empty hopes from this man, now, seeing him dead, they may receive my curb, instead of waiting till my chastisement make them wise perforce!

ELECTRA

No loyalty is lacking on my part; time hath taught me the prudence of concord with the stronger.

(*The central doors of the palace are thrown open and a shrouded corpse is disclosed.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *stand near it.*)

AEGISTHUS

O Zeus, I behold that which hath not fallen save by the doom of jealous Heaven; but, if Nemesis attend that word, be it unsaid!

Take all the covering from the face, that kinship, at least, may receive the tribute of lament from me also.

ORESTES

Lift the veil thyself; not my part this, but thine, to look upon these relics, and to greet them kindly.

AEGISTHUS

'Tis good counsel, and I will follow it.—(*To* ELECTRA) But thou—call me Clytemnestra, if she is within.

ORESTES

Lo, she is near thee: turn not thine eyes elsewhere.

(AEGISTHUS *removes the face-cloth from the corpse.*)

AEGISTHUS

O, what sight is this!

ORESTES

Why so scared? Is the face so strange?

AEGISTHUS

Who are the men into whose mid toils I have fallen, hapless that I am?

ORESTES

Nay, hast thou not discovered ere now that the dead, as thou miscallest them, are living?

AEGISTHUS

Alas, I read the riddle: this can be none but Orestes who speaks to me!

ORESTES

And, though so good a prophet, thou wast deceived so long?

AEGISTHUS

Oh lost, undone! Yet suffer me to say one word . . .

ELECTRA

In heaven's name, my brother, suffer him not to speak further, or to plead at length! When mortals are in the meshes of fate, how can such respite avail one who is to die? No,—slay him forthwith, and cast his corpse to the creatures from whom such as he should have burial, far from our sight! To me, nothing but this can make amends for the woes of the past.

ORESTES (*to* AEGISTHUS)

Go in, and quickly; the issue here is not of words, but of thy life.

AEGISTHUS

Why take me into the house? If this deed be fair, what need of darkness? Why is thy hand not prompt to strike?

ORESTES

Dictate not, but go where thou didst slay my father, that in the same place thou mayest die.

AEGISTHUS

Is this dwelling doomed to see all woes of Pelops' line, now, and in time to come?

ORESTES

Thine, at least; trust my prophetic skill so far.

AEGISTHUS

The skill thou vauntest belonged not to thy sire.

ORESTES

Thou bandiest words, and our going is delayed. Move forward!

AEGISTHUS

Lead thou.

ORESTES

Thou must go first.

AEGISTHUS

Lest I escape thee?

ORESTES

No, but that thou mayest not choose how to die; I must not spare thee any bitterness of death. And well it were if this judgment came straightway upon all who dealt in lawless deeds, even the judgment of the sword: so should not wickedness abound.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES *drive* AEGISTHUS *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

O house of Atreus, through how many sufferings hast thou come forth at last in freedom, crowned with good by this day's enterprise!

1. Jebb's note to this line points out that, according to the version of the legend which Sophocles is following, Agamemnon had four daughters, Iphigenia, who was sacrificed at Aulis, Electra, Chrysothemis, and Iphianassa. In other versions Iphigenia and Iphianassa are variant names for the same person.

2. A line has been lost here.

VI
PHILOCTETES

Characters in the Play

Ulysses, *King of Ithaca*
Neoptolemus, *son of Achilles*
Philoctetes, *son of Poeas and Companion of* Hercules
A Spy
Hercules
Chorus, *composed of the companions of* Ulysses *and* Neoptolemus

INTRODUCTION

THE *Philoctetes* was presented in 409 B.C. and received the first prize in the tragic contest in the spring of that year. Though written late in the poet's life, the play is among the greatest of his compositions. Both Aeschylus and Euripides also rendered in dramatic form the story of Philoctetes. These two plays are no longer extant, but through the writings of an ancient critic, who compared the three plays on the same subject composed by the three great tragedians, we know something about the Aeschylean and Euripidean versions. Furthermore the critic has given us his opinion that Sophocles' play surpassed in excellence the other two. Like *The Trachiniae,* it exhibits evidence of Euripidean influence, but in this instance the play has not suffered, but rather its quality has been enhanced.

The story of Philoctetes is found among the legends of the Trojan War. It seems that at Heracles' request Philoctetes, then a youth, lighted the funeral pyre of the hero, and in return for this service received Heracles' famed bow and arrows. Many years later, Philoctetes joined Agamemnon's host for the expedition against Troy. On the way to Troy an oracle commanded that certain sacrifices be made to Chrysa, a deity whose shrine was on a small island in the Aegean. Philoctetes alone of the expedition knew its whereabouts and therefore guided the Greeks to the spot. When they were preparing the sacrifice a serpent bit Philoctetes in the foot, and his cries of agony rendered it impossible to perform the sacrifice according to orthodox religious ritual. Furthermore, a foul stench which emanated from the wound made Philoctetes' presence intolerable to his companions. The commanders of the host, Agamemnon and Menelaus, solved the problem by ordering Odysseus (or Ulysses, as he is called in Francklin's translation) to place Philoctetes ashore on the uninhabited island of Lemnos. Here Philoctetes has remained in solitary suffering, inasmuch as his wound had never healed, eking out a painful existence, but still in possession of Heracles' bow. Meanwhile, at Troy the war was dragging on. Achilles and Ajax both were dead, and the Greek hopes were flagging. But then it was foretold that if Neoptolemus, Achilles' son, came to Troy, received his father's arms which were his

due, and if Philoctetes were rescued from Lemnos and brought to the Greek camp with Heracles' bow and arrows, Troy would be taken. Neoptolemus was accordingly sent for, presented with the arms, and accompanied Odysseus to Lemnos, from which he had been ordered to take Philoctetes. The play begins just after Odysseus and Neoptolemus have landed on the island.

There is no play among the Greek tragedies where a moral conflict or issue is more clearly or more forcefully presented than in the *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus faces the problem of deciding between the conflicting claims of patriotism and of personal honour. Odysseus endeavours to convince his young companion that the end of serving his "nation," so to speak, justifies the use of any means, and hence appears as the quasi-villain of the piece. Philoctetes, quite apart from the conflict between the other two principal characters, faces his own set of problems. Sophocles draws him magnificently, bringing out in his character the effects of his physical suffering, the mental torture he has endured as well, his hatred for the Atreidae and Odysseus, his pride, and his pathetic craving to be rescued. It is interesting to note that, though Sophocles could have convincingly resolved the complications of his plot without using a *deus ex machina*, he has chosen to introduce Heracles at the conclusion in that capacity. That Philoctetes finally leaves with Neoptolemus and Odysseus in accordance with Heracles' orders, seems to reflect Sophocles' conviction that ultimately the divine exercises control over human affairs, though men bear their fair share in working out their own destinies. In essence, Sophocles seems here to restate the religious thesis which is fundamental to *Oedipus the King*.

PHILOCTETES

(SCENE:—*A lonely region on the shore of Lemnos, before a steep cliff in which is the entrance to* PHILOCTETES' *cave.* ULYSSES, NEOPTOLEMUS *and an attendant enter.*)

ULYSSES

At length, my noble friend, thou bravest son
Of a brave father—father of us all,
The great Achilles—we have reached the shore
Of sea-girt Lemnos, desert and forlorn,
Where never tread of human step is seen,
Or voice of mortal heard, save his alone,
Poor Philoctetes, Poeas' wretched son,
Whom here I left; for such were my commands
From Grecia's chiefs, when by his fatal wound
Oppressed, his groans and execrations dreadful
Alarmed our hosts, our sacred rites profaned,
And interrupted holy sacrifice.
But why should I repeat the tale? The time
Admits not of delay. We must not linger,
Lest he discover our arrival here,
And all our purposed fraud to draw him hence
Be ineffectual. Lend me then thy aid.
Surveying round thee, canst thou see a rock
With double entrance—to the sun's warm rays
In winter open, and in summer's heat
Giving free passage to the welcome breeze?
A little to the left there is a fountain
Of living water, where, if yet he breathes,
He slakes his thirst. If aught thou seest of this
Inform me; so shall each to each impart
Counsel most fit, and serve our common cause.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*leaving* ULYSSES *a little behind him*)
If I mistake not, I behold a cave,
E'en such as thou describst.

ULYSSES
Dost thou? which way?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Yonder it is; but no path leading thither,
Or trace of human footstep.

ULYSSES
In his cell
A chance but he hath lain him down to rest;
Look if he hath not.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*advancing to the cave*)
Not a creature there.

ULYSSES
Nor food, nor mark of household preparation?

NEOPTOLEMUS
A rustic bed of scattered leaves.

ULYSSES
What more?

NEOPTOLEMUS
A wooden bowl, the work of some rude hand,
With a few sticks for fuel.

ULYSSES
This is all
His little treasure here.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Unhappy man!
Some linen for his wounds.

ULYSSES
This must be then
His place of habitation; far from hence
He cannot roam; distempered as he is,
It were impossible. He is but gone
A little way for needful food, or herb
Of power to 'suage and mitigate his pain.

Wherefore despatch this servant to some place
Of observation, whence he may espy
His every motion, lest he rush upon us.
There's not a Grecian whom his soul so much
Could wish to crush beneath him as Ulysses.
(*He makes a signal to the Attendant, who retires.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

He's gone to guard each avenue; and now,
If thou hast aught of moment to impart
Touching our purpose, say it; I attend.

ULYSSES

Son of Achilles, mark me well! Remember,
What we are doing not on strength alone,
Or courage, but on conduct will depend;
Therefore if aught uncommon be proposed,
Strange to thy ears and adverse to thy nature,
Reflect that 'tis thy duty to comply,
And act conjunctive with me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Well, what is it?

ULYSSES

We must deceive this Philoctetes; that
Will be thy task. When he shall ask thee who
And what thou art, Achilles' son reply—
Thus far within the verge of truth, no more.
Add that resentment fired thee to forsake
The Grecian fleet, and seek thy native soil,
Unkindly used by those who long with vows
Had sought thy aid to humble haughty Troy,
And when thou cam'st, ungrateful as they were,
The arms of great Achilles, thy just right,
Gave to Ulysses. Here thy bitter taunts
And sharp invectives liberally bestow
On me. Say what thou wilt, I shall forgive,
And Greece will not forgive thee if thou dost not;
For against Troy thy efforts are all vain
Without his arrows. Safely thou mayst hold
Friendship and converse with him, but I cannot.
Thou wert not with us when the war began,
Nor bound by solemn oath to join our host,

As I was; me he knows, and if he find
That I am with thee, we are both undone.
They must be ours then, these all-conquering arms;
Remember that. I know thy noble nature
Abhors the thought of treachery or fraud.
But what a glorious prize is victory!
Therefore be bold; we will be just hereafter.
Give to deceit and me a little portion
Of one short day, and for thy future life
Be called the holiest, worthiest, best of men.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What but to hear alarms my conscious soul,
Son of Laertes, I shall never practise.
I was not born to flatter or betray;
Nor I, nor he—the voice of fame reports—
Who gave me birth. What open arms can do
Behold me prompt to act, but ne'er to fraud
Will I descend. Sure we can more than match
In strength a foe thus lame and impotent.
I came to be a helpmate to thee, not
A base betrayer; and, O king! believe me,
Rather, much rather would I fall by virtue
Than rise by guilt to certain victory.

ULYSSES

O noble youth! and worthy of thy sire!
When I like thee was young, like thee of strength
And courage boastful, little did I deem
Of human policy; but long experience
Hath taught me, son, 'tis not the powerful arm,
But soft enchanting tongue that governs all.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And thou wouldst have me tell an odious falsehood?

ULYSSES

He must be gained by fraud.

NEOPTOLEMUS

By fraud? And why
Not by persuasion?

ULYSSES
He'll not listen to it;
And force were vainer still.

NEOPTOLEMUS
What mighty power
Hath he to boast?

ULYSSES
His arrows winged with death
Inevitable.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Then it were not safe
E'en to approach him.

ULYSSES
No; unless by fraud
He be secured.

NEOPTOLEMUS
And thinkst thou 'tis not base
To tell a lie then?

ULYSSES
Not if on that lie
Depends our safety.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Who shall dare to tell it
Without a blush?

ULYSSES
We need not blush at aught
That may promote our interest and success.

NEOPTOLEMUS
But where's the interest that should bias me?
Come he or not to Troy, imports it aught
To Neoptolemus?

ULYSSES
Troy cannot fall
Without his arrows.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Saidst thou not that I
Was destined to destroy her?

ULYSSES

Without them
Naught canst thou do, and they without thee nothing.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Then I must have them.

ULYSSES

When thou hast, remember
A double prize awaits thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What, Ulysses?

ULYSSES

The glorious names of valiant and of wise.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Away! I'll do it. Thoughts of guilt or shame
No more appal me.

ULYSSES

Wilt thou do it then?
Wilt thou remember what I told thee of?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Depend on 't; I have promised—that's sufficient.

ULYSSES

Here then remain thou; I must not be seen.
If thou stay long, I'll send a faithful spy,
Who in a sailor's habit well disguised
May pass unknown; of him, from time to time,
What best may suit our purpose thou shalt know.
I'll to the ship. Farewell! and may the god
Who brought us here, the fraudful Mercury,
And great Minerva, guardian of our country,
And ever kind to me, protect us still!

(ULYSSES *goes out as the* CHORUS *enters. The following lines are chanted responsively between* NEOPTOLEMUS *and the* CHORUS.)

CHORUS

strophe 1

Master, instruct us, strangers as we are,
What we may utter, what we must conceal.
Doubtless the man we seek will entertain
Suspicion of us; how are we to act?
To those alone belongs the art to rule
Who bear the sceptre from the hand of Jove;
To thee of right devolves the power supreme,
From thy great ancestors delivered down;
Speak then, our royal lord, and we obey.

NEOPTOLEMUS

systema 1

If you would penetrate yon deep recess
To seek the cave where Philoctetes lies,
Go forward; but remember to return
When the poor wanderer comes this way, prepared
To aid our purpose here if need require.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

O king! we ever meant to fix our eyes
On thee, and wait attentive to thy will;
But, tell us, in what part is he concealed?
'Tis fit we know the place, lest unobserved
He rush upon us. Which way doth it lie?
Seest thou his footsteps leading from the cave,
Or hither bent?

NEOPTOLEMUS (*advancing towards the cave*)

systema 2

Behold the double door
Of his poor dwelling, and the flinty bed.

CHORUS

And whither is its wretched master gone?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Doubtless in search of food, and not far off,
For such his manner is; accustomed here,
So fame reports, to pierce with winged arrows
His savage prey for daily sustenance,
His wound still painful, and no hope of cure.

CHORUS

strophe 2

Alas! I pity him. Without a friend,
Without a fellow-sufferer, left alone,
Deprived of all the mutual joys that flow
From sweet society—distempered too!
How can he bear it? O unhappy race
Of mortal man! doomed to an endless round
Of sorrows, and immeasurable woe!

antistrophe 2

Second to none in fair nobility
Was Philoctetes, of illustrious race;
Yet here he lies, from every human aid
Far off removed, in dreadful solitude,
And mingles with the wild and savage herd;
With them in famine and in misery
Consumes his days, and weeps their common fate,
Unheeded, save when babbling echo mourns
In bitterest notes responsive to his woe.

NEOPTOLEMUS

systema 3

And yet I wonder not; for if aright
I judge, from angry heaven the sentence came,
And Chrysa was the cruel source of all;
Nor doth this sad disease inflict him still
Incurable, without assenting gods?
For so they have decreed, lest Troy should fall
Beneath his arrows ere th' appointed time
Of its destruction come.

CHORUS

strophe 3

No more, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS

What sayst thou?

CHORUS

Sure I heard a dismal groan
Of some afflicted wretch.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Which way?

CHORUS

E'en now
I hear it, and the sound as of some step
Slow-moving this way. He is not far from us.
His plaints are louder now.

antistrophe 3

Prepare, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS

For what?

CHORUS

New troubles; for behold he comes!
Not like the shepherd with his rural pipe
And cheerful song, but groaning heavily.
Either his wounded foot against some thorn
Hath struck, and pains him sorely, or perchance
He hath espied from far some ship attempting
To enter this inhospitable port,
And hence his cries to save it from destruction.

(PHILOCTETES *enters, clad in rags. He moves with difficulty and is obviously suffering pain from his injured foot.*)

PHILOCTETES

Say, welcome strangers, what disastrous fate
Led you to this inhospitable shore,
Nor haven safe, nor habitation fit
Affording ever? Of what clime, what race?
Who are ye? Speak! If I may trust that garb,
Familiar once to me, ye are of Greece,
My much-loved country. Let me hear the sound
Of your long wished-for voices. Do not look
With horror on me, but in kind compassion
Pity a wretch deserted and forlorn
In this sad place. Oh! if ye come as friends,
Speak then, and answer—hold some converse with me,
For this at least from man to man is due.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Know, stranger, first what most thou seemst to wish;
We are of Greece.

PHILOCTETES

Oh! happiness to hear!
After so many years of dreadful silence,
How welcome was that sound! Oh! tell me, son,
What chance, what purpose, who conducted thee?
What brought thee thither, what propitious gale?
Who art thou? Tell me all—inform me quickly.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Native of Scyros, hither I return;
My name is Neoptolemus, the son
Of brave Achilles. I have told thee all.

PHILOCTETES

Dear is thy country, and thy father dear
To me, thou darling of old Lycomede;
But tell me in what fleet, and whence thou cam'st.

NEOPTOLEMUS

From Troy.

PHILOCTETES

From Troy? I think thou wert not with us
When first our fleet sailed forth.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Wert thou then there?
Or knowst thou aught of that great enterprise?

PHILOCTETES

Know you not then the man whom you behold?

NEOPTOLEMUS

How should I know whom I had never seen?

PHILOCTETES

Have you ne'er heard of me, nor of my name?
Hath my sad story never reached your ear?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Never.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! how hateful to the gods,
How very poor a wretch must I be then,
That Greece should never hear of woes like mine!
But they who sent me hither, they concealed them,

And smile triumphant, whilst my cruel wounds
Grow deeper still. O, sprung from great Achilles!
Behold before thee Poeas' wretched son,
With whom, a chance but thou hast heard, remain
The dreadful arrows of renowned Alcides,
E'en the unhappy Philoctetes—him
Whom the Atreidae and the vile Ulysses
Inhuman left, distempered as I was
By the envenomed serpent's deep-felt wound.
Soon as they saw that, with long toil oppressed,
Sleep had o'ertaken me on the hollow rock,
There did they leave me when from Chrysa's shore
They bent their fatal course; a little food
And these few rags were all they would bestow.
Such one day be their fate! Alas! my son,
How dreadful, thinkst thou, was that waking to me,
When from my sleep I rose and saw them not!
How did I weep! and mourn my wretched state!
When not a ship remained of all the fleet
That brought me here—no kind companion left
To minister or needful food or balm
To my sad wounds. On every side I looked,
And nothing saw but woe; of that indeed
Measure too full. For day succeeded day,
And still no comfort came; myself alone
Could to myself the means of life afford,
In this poor grotto. On my bow I lived:
The winged dove, which my sharp arrow slew,
With pain I brought into my little hut,
And feasted there; then from the broken ice
I slaked my thirst, or crept into the wood
For useful fuel; from the stricken flint
I drew the latent spark, that warms me still
And still revives. This with my humble roof
Preserve me, son. But, oh! my wounds remain.
Thou seest an island desolate and waste;
No friendly port nor hopes of gain to tempt,
Nor host to welcome in the traveller;
Few seek the wild inhospitable shore.
By adverse winds, sometimes th' unwilling guests,
As well thou mayst suppose, were hither driven;
But when they came, they only pitied me,
Gave me a little food, or better garb

To shield me from the cold; in vain I prayed
That they would bear me to my native soil,
For none would listen. Here for ten long years
Have I remained, whilst misery and famine
Keep fresh my wounds, and double my misfortune.
This have th' Atreidae and Ulysses done,
And may the gods with equal woes repay them!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O, son of Poeas! well might those, who came
And saw thee thus, in kind compassion weep;
I too must pity thee—I can no more.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I can bear witness to thee, for I know
By sad experience what th' Atreidae are,
And what Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES

Hast thou suffered then?
And dost thou hate them too?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Oh! that these hands
Could vindicate my wrongs! Mycenae then
And Sparta should confess that Scyros boasts
Of sons as brave and valiant as their own.

PHILOCTETES

O noble youth! But wherefore cam'st thou hither?
Whence this resentment?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I will tell thee all,
If I can bear to tell it. Know then, soon
As great Achilles died—

PHILOCTETES

Oh, stay, my son!
Is then Achilles dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS

He is, and not
By mortal hand, but by Apollo's shaft
Fell glorious.

PHILOCTETES

Oh! most worthy of each other,
The slayer and the slain! Permit me, son,
To mourn his fate, ere I attend to thine.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas! thou needst not weep for others' woes,
Thou hast enough already of thy own.

PHILOCTETES

'Tis very true; and therefore to thy tale.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thus then it was. Soon as Achilles died,
Phoenix, the guardian of his tender years,
Instant sailed forth, and sought me out at Scyros;
With him the wary chief Ulysses came.
They told me then (or true or false I know not),
My father dead, by me, and me alone
Proud Troy must fall. I yielded to their prayers;
I hoped to see at least the dear remains
Of him whom living I had long in vain
Wished to behold. Safe at Sigeum's port
Soon we arrived. In crowds the numerous host
Thronged to embrace me, called the gods to witness
In me once more they saw their loved Achilles
To life restored; but he, alas! was gone.
I shed the duteous tear, then sought my friends
Th' Atreidae—friends I thought 'em!—claimed the arms
Of my dead father, and what else remained
His late possession: when—O cruel words!
And wretched I to hear them—thus they answered:
"Son of Achilles, thou in vain demandst
Those arms already to Ulysses given;
The rest be thine." I wept. "And is it thus,"
Indignant I replied, "ye dare to give
My right away?" "Know, boy," Ulysses cried,
"That right was mine, and therefore they bestowed
The boon on me: me who preserved the arms,
And him who bore them too." With anger fired
At this proud speech, I threatened all that rage
Could dictate to me if he not returned them.
Stung with my words, yet calm, he answered me:
"Thou wert not with us; thou wert in a place

Where thou shouldst not have been; and since thou meanst
To brave us thus, know, thou shalt never bear
Those arms with thee to Scyros; 'tis resolved."
Thus injured, thus deprived of all I held
Most precious, by the worst of men, I left
The hateful place, and seek my native soil.
Nor do I blame so much the proud Ulysses
As his base masters—army, city, all
Depend on those who rule. When men grow vile
The guilt is theirs who taught them to be wicked.
I've told thee all, and him who hates the Atreidae
I hold a friend to me and to the gods.

CHORUS (*singing*)

O Earth! thou mother of great Jove,
Embracing all with universal love,
Author benign of every good,
Through whom Pactolus rolls his golden flood!
To thee, whom in thy rapid car
Fierce lions draw, I rose and made my prayer—
To thee I made my sorrows known,
When from Achilles' injured son
Th' Atreidae gave the prize, that fatal day
When proud Ulysses bore his arms away.

PHILOCTETES

I wonder not, my friend, to see you here,
And I believe the tale; for well I know
The man who wronged you, know the base Ulysses
Falsehood and fraud dwell on his lips, and nought
That's just or good can be expected from him.
But strange it is to me that, Ajax present,
He dare attempt it.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Ajax is no more;
Had he been living, I had ne'er been spoiled
Thus of my right.

PHILOCTETES

Is he then dead?

NEOPTOLEMUS

He is.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! the son of Tydeus, and that slave,
Sold by his father Sisyphus, they live,
Unworthy as they are.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas! they do,
And flourish still.

PHILOCTETES

My old and worthy friend
The Pylian sage, how is he? He could see
Their arts, and would have given them better counsels.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Weighed down with grief he lives, but most unhappy,
Weeps his lost son, his dear Antilochus.

PHILOCTETES

O double woe! whom I could most have wished
To live and to be happy, those to perish!
Ulysses to survive! It should not be.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Oh! 'tis a subtle foe; but deepest plans
May sometimes fail.

PHILOCTETES

Where was Patroclus then,
Thy father's dearest friend?

NEOPTOLEMUS

He too was dead.
In war, alas—so fate ordains it ever—
The coward 'scapes, the brave and virtuous fall.

PHILOCTETES

It is too true; and now thou talkst of cowards,
Where is that worthless wretch, of readiest tongue,
Subtle and voluble?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Ulysses?

PHILOCTETES

No;
Thersites, ever talking, never heard.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I have not seen him, but I hear he lives.

PHILOCTETES

I did not doubt it: evil never dies;
The gods take care of that. If aught there be
Fraudful and vile, 'tis safe; the good and just
Perish unpitied by them. Wherefore is it?
When gods do ill, why should we worship them?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Since thus it is, since virtue is oppressed,
And vice triumphant, who deserve to live
Are doomed to perish, and the guilty reign.
Henceforth, O son of Poeas! far from Troy
And the Atreidae will I live remote.
I would not see the man I cannot love.
My barren Scyros shall afford me refuge,
And home-felt joys delight my future days.
So, fare thee well, and may th' indulgent gods
Heal thy sad wound, and grant thee every wish
Thy soul can form! Once more, farewell! I go,
The first propitious gale.

PHILOCTETES

What! now, my son?
So soon?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Immediately; the time demands
We should be near, and ready to depart.

PHILOCTETES

Now, by the memory of thy honoured sire,
By thy loved mother, by whate'er remains
On earth most dear to thee, oh! hear me now,
Thy suppliant! Do not, do not thus forsake me,
Alone, oppressed, deserted, as thou seest,
In this sad place. I shall, I know it must, be
A burthen to thee. But, oh! bear it kindly;
For ever doth the noble mind abhor
Th' ungenerous deed, and loves humanity;
Disgrace attends thee if thou dost forsake me,
If not, immortal fame rewards thy goodness.
Thou mayst convey me safe to Oeta's shores

In one short day; I'll trouble you no longer.
Hide me in any part where I may least
Molest you. Hear me! By the guardian god
Of the poor suppliant, all-protecting Jove,
I beg. Behold me at thy feet, infirm,
And wretched as I am, I clasp thy knees.
Leave me not here then, where there is no mark
Of human footstep—take me to thy home!
Or to Euboea's port, to Oeta, thence
Short is the way to Trachin, or the banks
Of Spercheius' gentle stream, to meet my father,
If yet he lives; for, oh! I begged him oft
By those who hither came, to fetch me hence—
Or is he dead, or they neglectful bent
Their hasty course to their own native soil.
Be thou my better guide! Pity and save
The poor and wretched. Think, my son, how frail
And full of danger is the state of man—
Now prosperous, now adverse. Who feels no ills
Should therefore fear them; and when fortune smiles
Be doubly cautious, lest destruction come
Remorseless on him, and he fall unpitied.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Oh, pity him, my lord, for bitterest woes
And trials most severe he hath recounted;
Far be such sad distress from those I love!
Oh! if thou hat'st the base Atreidae, now
Revenge thee on them, serve their deadliest foe;
Bear the poor suppliant to his native soil;
So shalt thou bless thy friend, and 'scape the wrath
Of the just gods, who still protect the wretched.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Your proffered kindness, friends, may cost you dear;
When you shall feel his dreadful malady
Oppress you sore, you will repent it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Never
Shall that reproach be ours.

NEOPTOLEMUS

In generous pity
Of the afflicted thus to be o'ercome

Were most disgraceful to me; he shall go.
May the kind gods speed our departure hence,
And guide our vessels to the wished-for shore!

PHILOCTETES

O happy hour! O kindest, best of men!
And you my dearest friends! how shall I thank you?
What shall I do to show my grateful heart?
Let us be gone! But, oh! permit me first
To take a last farewell of my poor hut,
Where I so long have lived. Perhaps you'll say
I must have had a noble mind to bear it.
The very sight to any eyes but mine
Were horrible, but sad necessity
At length prevailed, and made it pleasing to me.

LEADER

One from our ship, my lord, and with him comes
A stranger. Stop a moment till we hear
Their business with us.

(*The* SPY *enters, dressed as a merchant. He is accompanied by one of* NEOPTOLEMUS' *men.*)

SPY

Son of great Achilles,
Know, chance alone hath brought me hither, driven
By adverse winds to where thy vessels lay,
As home I sailed from Troy. There did I meet
This my companion, who informed me where
Thou mightst be found. Hence to pursue my course
And not to tell thee what concerns thee near
Had been ungenerous, thou perhaps meantime
Of Greece and of her counsels naught suspecting,
Counsels against thee not by threats alone
Or words enforced, but now in execution.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Now by my virtue, stranger, for thy news
I am much bound to thee, and will repay
Thy service. Tell me what the Greeks have done.

SPY

A fleet already sails to fetch thee back,
Conducted by old Phoenix, and the sons
Of valiant Theseus.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Come they then to force me?
Or am I to be won by their persuasion?

SPY
I know not that; you have what I could learn.

NEOPTOLEMUS
And did th' Atreidae send them?

SPY
Sent they are,
And will be with you soon.

NEOPTOLEMUS
But wherefore then
Came not Ulysses? Did his courage fail?

SPY
He, ere I left the camp, with Diomede
On some important embassy sailed forth
In search—

NEOPTOLEMUS
Of whom?

SPY
There was a man—but stay,
Who is thy friend here, tell me, but speak softly.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*whispering to him*)
The famous Philoctetes.

SPY
Ha! begone then!
Ask me no more—away, immediately!

PHILOCTETES
What do these dark mysterious whispers mean?
Concern they me, my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS
I know not what
He means to say, but I would have him speak
Boldly before us all, whate'er it be.

SPY

Do not betray me to the Grecian host,
Nor make me speak what I would fain conceal.
I am but poor—they have befriended me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

In me thou seest an enemy confest
To the Atreidae. This is my best friend
Because he hates them too; if thou art mine,
Hide nothing then.

SPY

Consider first.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I have.

SPY

The blame will be on you.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Why, let it be:
But speak, I charge thee.

SPY

Since I must then, know,
In solemn league combined, the bold Ulysses
And gallant Diomede have sworn by force
Or by persuasion to bring back thy friend:
The Grecians heard Laertes' son declare
His purpose; far more resolute he seemed
Than Diomede, and surer of success.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But why th' Atreidae, after so long time,
Again should wish to see this wretched exile,
Whence this desire? Came it from th' angry gods
To punish thus their inhumanity?

SPY

I can inform you; for perhaps from Greece
Of late you have not heard. There was a prophet,
Son of old Priam, Helenus by name,
Him, in his midnight walks, the wily chief
Ulysses, curse of every tongue, espied;
Took him, and led him captive, to the Greeks

A welcome spoil. Much he foretold to all,
And added last that Troy should never fall
Till Philoctetes from this isle returned.
Ulysses heard, and instant promise gave
To fetch him hence; he hoped by gentle means
To gain him; those successless, force at last
Could but compel him. He would go, he cried,
And if he failed his head should pay th' forfeit.
I've told thee all, and warn thee to be gone,
Thou and thy friend, if thou wouldst wish to save him.

PHILOCTETES

And does the traitor think he can persuade me?
As well might he persuade me to return
From death to life, as his base father did.

SPY

Of that I know not: I must to my ship.
Farewell, and may the gods protect you both!
(*The* SPY *departs.*)

PHILOCTETES

Lead me—expose me to the Grecian host!
And could the insolent Ulysses hope
With his soft flatteries e'er to conquer me?
No! Sooner would I listen to the voice
Of that fell serpent, whose envenomed tongue
Hath lamed me thus. But what is there he dare not
Or say or do? I know he will be here
E'en now, depend on't. Therefore, let's away!
Quick let the sea divide us from Ulysses.
Let us be gone; for well-timed expedition,
The task performed, brings safety and repose.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Soon as the wind permits us we embark,
But now 'tis adverse.

PHILOCTETES

Every wind is fair
When we are flying from misfortune.

NEOPTOLEMUS

True;
And 'tis against them too.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! no storms
Can drive back fraud and rapine from their prey.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I'm ready. Take what may be necessary,
And follow me.

PHILOCTETES

I want not much.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Perhaps
My ship will furnish you.

PHILOCTETES

There is a plant
Which to my wound gives some relief; I must
Have that.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Is there aught else?

PHILOCTETES

Alas! my bow
I had forgot. I must not lose that treasure.
(PHILOCTETES *steps into the cave, and brings out his bow and arrows.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

Are these the famous arrows then?

PHILOCTETES

They are.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And may I be permitted to behold,
To touch, to pay my adoration to them?

PHILOCTETES

In these, my son, in everything that's mine
Thou hast a right.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But if it be a crime,
I would not; otherwise——

PHILOCTETES

Oh! thou art full
Of piety; in thee it is no crime;
In thee, my friend, by whom alone I look
Once more with pleasure on the radiant sun—
By whom I live—who giv'st me to return
To my dear father, to my friends, my country:
Sunk as I was beneath my foes, once more
I rise to triumph o'er them by thy aid:
Behold them, touch them, but return them to me,
And boast that virtue which on thee alone
Bestowed such honour. Virtue made them mine.
I can deny thee nothing: he, whose heart
Is grateful can alone deserve the name
Of friend, to every treasure far superior.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Go in.

PHILOCTETES

Come with me; for my painful wound
Requires thy friendly hand to help me onward.
(*They go into the cave.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Since proud Ixion, doomed to feel
The tortures of th' eternal wheel,
Bound by the hand of angry Jove,
Received the due rewards of impious love;
Ne'er was distress so deep or woe so great
As on the wretched Philoctetes wait;
Who ever with the just and good,
Guiltless of fraud and rapine, stood,
And the fair paths of virtue still pursued;
Alone on this inhospitable shore,
Where waves for ever beat and tempests roar,
How could he e'er or hope or comfort know,
Or painful life support beneath such weight of woe?

antistrophe 1

Exposed to the inclement skies,
Deserted and forlorn he lies,
No friend or fellow-mourner there

To soothe his sorrows and divide his care,
Or seek the healing plant of power to 'suage
His aching wound and mitigate its rage;
But if perchance, awhile released
From torturing pain, he sinks to rest,
Awakened soon, and by sharp hunger prest,
Compelled to wander forth in search of food,
He crawls in anguish to the neighbouring wood;
Even as the tottering infant in despair
Who mourns an absent mother's kind supporting care.

strophe 2

The teeming earth, who mortals still supplies
With every good, to him her seed denies;
A stranger to the joy that flows
From the kind aid which man on man bestows;
Nor food, alas! to him was given,
Save when his arrows pierced the birds of heaven;
Nor e'er did Bacchus' heart-expanding bowl
For ten long years relieve his cheerless soul;
But glad was he his eager thirst to slake
In the unwholesome pool, or ever-stagnant lake.

antistrophe 2

But now, behold the joyful captive freed;
A fairer fate, and brighter days succeed:
For he at last hath found a friend
Of noblest race, to save and to defend,
To guide him with protecting hand,
And safe restore him to his native land;
On Spercheius' flowery banks to join the throng
Of Malian nymphs, and lead the choral song
On Oeta's top, which saw Alcides rise,
And from the flaming pile ascend his native skies.

(NEOPTOLEMUS *and* PHILOCTETES *enter from the cave.* PHILOCTETES *is suddenly seized with spasms of pain. He still holds in his hand the bow and arrows.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

Come, Philoctetes; why thus silent? Wherefore
This sudden terror on thee?

PHILOCTETES
Oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Whence is it?

PHILOCTETES
Nothing, my son; go on!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Is it thy wound
That pains thee thus?

PHILOCTETES
No; I am better now.
O gods!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Why dost thou call thus on the gods?

PHILOCTETES
To smile propitious, and preserve us—Oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Thou art in misery. Tell me—wilt thou not?
What is it?

PHILOCTETES
O my son! I can no longer
Conceal it from thee. Oh! I die, I perish;
By the great gods let me implore thee, now
This moment, if thou hast a sword, oh! strike,
Cut off this painful limb, and end my being!

NEOPTOLEMUS
What can this mean, that unexpected thus
It should torment thee?

PHILOCTETES
Know you not, my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS
What is the cause?

PHILOCTETES
Can you not guess it?

NEOPTOLEMUS

No.

PHILOCTETES

Nor I.

NEOPTOLEMUS

That's stranger still.

PHILOCTETES

My son, my son!

NEOPTOLEMUS

This new attack is terrible indeed!

PHILOCTETES

'Tis inexpressible! Have pity on me!

NEOPTOLEMUS

What shall I do?

PHILOCTETES

Do not be terrified,
And leave me. Its returns are regular,
And like the traveller, when its appetite
Is satisfied, it will depart. Oh! oh!

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thou art oppressed with ills on every side.
Give me thy hand. Come, wilt thou lean upon me?

PHILOCTETES

No; but these arrows take; preserve 'em for me.
A little while, till I grow better. Sleep
Is coming on me, and my pains will cease.
Let me be quiet. If meantime our foes
Surprise thee, let nor force nor artifice
Deprive thee of the great, the precious trust
I have reposed in thee; that were ruin
To thee, and to thy friend.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Be not afraid—
No hands but mine shall touch them; give them to me.

PHILOCTETES

Receive them, son; and let it be thy prayer
They bring not woes on thee, as they have done
To me and to Alcides.

(PHILOCTETES *gives him the bow and arrows.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

May the gods
Forbid it ever! May they guide our course
And speed our prosperous sails!

PHILOCTETES

Alas! my son,
I fear thy vows are vain. Behold my blood
Flows from the wound? Oh! how it pains me! Now
It comes, it hastens! Do not, do not leave me!
Oh! that Ulysses felt this racking torture,
E'en to his inmost soul! Again it comes!
O Agamemnon! Menelaus! why
Should not you bear these pangs as I have done?
O death! where art thou, death? so often called,
Wilt thou not listen? wilt thou never come?
Take thou the Lemnian fire, my generous friend,
Do me the same kind office which I did
For my Alcides. These are thy reward;
He gave them to me. Thou alone deservest
The great inheritance. What says my friend?
What says my dear preserver? Oh! where art thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I mourn thy hapless fate.

PHILOCTETES

Be of good cheer,
Quick my disorder comes, and goes as soon;
I only beg thee not to leave me here.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Depend on't, I will stay.

PHILOCTETES

Wilt thou indeed?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Trust me, I will.

PHILOCTETES
I need not bind thee to it
By oath.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Oh, no! 'twere impious to forsake thee.

PHILOCTETES
Give me thy hand, and pledge thy faith.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I do.

PHILOCTETES (*pointing up to heaven*)
Thither, oh, thither lead!

NEOPTOLEMUS
What sayst thou? where?

PHILOCTETES
Above——

NEOPTOLEMUS
What, lost again? Why lookst thou thus
On that bright circle?

PHILOCTETES
Let me, let me go!

NEOPTOLEMUS (*lays hold of him*)
Where wouldst thou go?

PHILOCTETES
Loose me.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I will not.

PHILOCTETES
Oh!
You'll kill me, if you do not.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*lets him go*)
There, then; now
Is thy mind better?

PHILOCTETES

Oh! receive me, earth!
Receive a dying man. Here must I lie;
For, oh! my pain's so great I cannot rise.
(PHILOCTETES *sinks down on the earth near the entrance of the cave.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

Sleep hath o'ertaken him. See, his head is lain
On the cold earth; the balmy sweat thick drops
From every limb, and from the broken vein
Flows the warm blood; let us indulge his slumbers.

CHORUS (*singing*)

Sleep, thou patron of mankind,
Great physician of the mind,
Who dost nor pain nor sorrow know,
Sweetest balm of every woe,
Mildest sovereign, hear us now;
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow;
His eyes in gentle slumbers close,
And continue his repose;
Hear thy wretched suppliant's vow,
Great physician, hear us now.

And now, my son, what best may suit thy purpose
Consider well, and how we are to act.
What more can we expect? The time is come;
For better far is opportunity
Seized at the lucky hour than all the counsels
Which wisdom dictates or which craft inspires.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*chanting*)

He hears us not. But easy as it is
To gain the prize, it would avail us nothing
Were he not with us. Phoebus hath reserved
For him alone the crown of victory;
But thus to boast of what we could not do,
And break our word, were most disgraceful to us.

CHORUS (*singing*)

The gods will guide us, fear it not, my son;
But what thou sayst speak soft, for well thou knowst
The sick man's sleep is short. He may awake
And hear us; therefore let us hide our purpose.

If then thou thinkst as he does—thou knowst whom—
This is the hour. At such a time, my son,
The wisest err. But mark me, the wind's fair,
And Philoctetes sleeps, void of all help—
Lame, impotent, unable to resist,
He is as one among the dead. E'en now
We'll take him with us. 'Twere an easy task.
Leave it to me, my son. There is no danger.

NEOPTOLEMUS

No more! His eyes are open. See, he moves.

PHILOCTETES (*awaking*)

O fair returning light! beyond my hope;
You too, my kind preservers! O my son!
I could not think thou wouldst have stayed so long
In kind compassion to thy friend. Alas!
The Atreidae never would have acted thus.
But noble is thy nature, and thy birth,
And therefore little did my wretchedness,
Nor from my wounds the noisome stench deter
Thy generous heart. I have a little respite;
Help me, my son! I'll try to rise; this weakness
Will leave me soon, and then we'll go together.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I little thought to find thee thus restored.
Trust me, I joy to see thee free from pain,
And hear thee speak; the marks of death were on thee.
Raise thyself up; thy friends here, if thou wilt,
Shall carry thee, 'twill be no burthen to them
If we request it.

PHILOCTETES

No; thy hand alone;
I will not trouble them; 'twill be enough
If they can bear with me and my distemper
When we embark.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Well, be it so; but rise.

PHILOCTETES (*rising*)

Oh! never fear; I'll rise as well as ever.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*half to himself*)
How shall I act?

PHILOCTETES
What says my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Alas!
I know not what to say; my doubtful mind——

PHILOCTETES
Talked you of doubts? You did not surely.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Aye,
That's my misfortune.

PHILOCTETES
Is then my distress
The cause at last you will not take me with you?

NEOPTOLEMUS
All is distress and misery when we act
Against our nature and consent to ill.

PHILOCTETES
But sure to help a good man in misfortunes
Is not against thy nature.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Men will call me
A villain; that distracts me.

PHILOCTETES
Not for this;
For what thou meanst to do thou mayst deserve it.

NEOPTOLEMUS
What shall I do? Direct me, Jove! To hide
What I should speak, and tell a base untruth
Were double guilt.

PHILOCTETES
He purposes at last,
I fear it much, to leave me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Leave thee! No!
But how to make thee go with pleasure hence,
There I'm distressed.

PHILOCTETES

I understand thee not;
What means my son?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I can no longer hide
The dreadful secret from thee; thou art going
To Troy, e'en to the Greeks, to the Atreidae.

PHILOCTETES

Alas! what sayest thou?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Do not weep, but hear me.

PHILOCTETES

What must I hear? what wilt thou do with me?

NEOPTOLEMUS

First set thee free; then carry thee, my friend,
To conquer Troy.

PHILOCTETES

Is this indeed thy purpose?

NEOPTOLEMUS

This am I bound to do.

PHILOCTETES

Then am I lost,
Undone, betrayed. Canst thou, my friend, do this?
Give me my arms again.

NEOPTOLEMUS

It cannot be.
I must obey the powers who sent me hither;
Justice enjoins—the common cause demands it.

PHILOCTETES

Thou worst of men, thou vile artificer
Of fraud most infamous, what hast thou done?
How have I been deceived? Dost thou not blush

To look upon me, to behold me thus
Beneath thy feet imploring? Base betrayer!
To rob me of my bow, the means of life,
The only means—give 'em, restore 'em to me!
Do not take all! Alas! he hears me not,
Nor deigns to speak, but casts an angry look
That says I never shall be free again.
O mountains, rivers, rocks, and savage herds!
To you I speak—to you alone I now
Must breathe my sorrows; you are wont to hear
My sad complaints, and I will tell you all
That I have suffered from Achilles' son,
Who, bound by solemn oath to bear me hence
To my dear native soil, now sails for Troy.
The perjured wretch first gave his plighted hand,
Then stole the sacred arrows of my friend,
The son of Jove, the great Alcides; those
He means to show the Greeks, to snatch me hence
And boast his prize, as if poor Philoctetes,
This empty shade, were worthy of his arm.
Had I been what I was, he ne'er had thus
Subdued me, and e'en now to fraud alone
He owes the conquest. I have been betrayed!
Give me my arms again, and be thyself
Once more. Oh, speak! Thou wilt not? Then I'm lost.
O my poor hut! again I come to thee
Naked and destitute of food; once more
Receive me, here to die; for now, no longer
Shall my swift arrow reach the flying prey,
Or on the mountains pierce the wandering herd:
I shall myself afford a banquet now
To those I used to feed on—they the hunters,
And I their easy prey; so shall the blood
Which I so oft have shed be paid by mine;
And all this too from him whom once I deemed
Stranger to fraud nor capable of ill;
And yet I will not curse thee till I know
Whether thou still retainst thy horrid purpose,
Or dost repent thee of it; if thou dost not,
Destruction wait thee!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

We attend your pleasure,
My royal lord, we must be gone; determine
To leave, or take him with us.

NEOPTOLEMUS

His distress
Doth move me much. Trust me, I long have felt
Compassion for him.

PHILOCTETES

Oh! then by the gods
Pity me now, my son, nor let mankind
Reproach thee for a fraud so base.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas!
What shall I do? Would I were still at Scyros!
For I am most unhappy.

PHILOCTETES

O my son!
Thou art not base by nature, but misguided
By those who are, to deeds unworthy of thee.
Turn then thy fraud on them who best deserve it;
Restore my arms, and leave me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Speak, my friends,
What's to be done?

(ULYSSES *enters suddenly.*)

ULYSSES

Ah! dost thou hesitate?
Traitor, be gone! Give me the arms.

PHILOCTETES

Ah me!
Ulysses here?

ULYSSES

Aye! 'tis Ulysses' self
That stands before thee.

PHILOCTETES

Then I'm lost, betrayed!
This was the cruel spoiler.

ULYSSES

Doubt it not.
'Twas I; I do confess it.

PHILOCTETES (*to* NEOPTOLEMUS)

O my son!
Give me them back.

ULYSSES

It must not be; with them
Thyself must go, or we shall drag thee hence.

PHILOCTETES

And will they force me? O thou daring villain!

ULYSSES

They will, unless thou dost consent to go.

PHILOCTETES

Wilt thou, O Lemnos! wilt thou, mighty Vulcan!
With thy all-conquering fire, permit me thus
To be torn from thee?

ULYSSES

Know, great Jove himself
Doth here preside. He hath decreed thy fate;
I but perform his will.

PHILOCTETES

Detested wretch,
Mak'st thou the gods a cover for thy crime?
Do they teach falsehood?

ULYSSES

No, they taught me truth,
And therefore, hence—that way thy journey lies.
(*Pointing to the sea*)

PHILOCTETES

It doth not.

ULYSSES

But I say it must be so.

PHILOCTETES

And Philoctetes then was born a slave!
I did not know it.

ULYSSES

No; I mean to place thee
E'en with the noblest, e'en with those by whom
Proud Troy must perish.

PHILOCTETES

Never will I go,
Befall what may, whilst this deep cave is open
To bury all my sorrows.

ULYSSES

What wouldst do?

PHILOCTETES

Here throw me down, dash out my desperate brains
Against this rock, and sprinkle it with my blood.

ULYSSES (*to the* CHORUS)

Seize, and prevent him!

(*They seize him.*)

PHILOCTETES

Manacled! O hands!
How helpless are you now! those arms, which once
Protected, thus torn from you! (*To* ULYSSES)
Thou abandoned,
Thou shameless wretch! from whom nor truth nor justice,
Naught that becomes the generous mind, can flow,
How hast thou used me! how betrayed! Suborned
This stranger, this poor youth, who, worthier far
To be my friend than thine, was only here
Thy instrument; he knew not what he did,
And now, thou seest, repents him of the crime
Which brought such guilt on him, such woes on me.
But thy foul soul, which from its dark recess
Trembling looks forth, beheld him void of art,
Unwilling as he was, instructed him,
And made him soon a master in deceit.
I am thy prisoner now; e'en now thou meanst
To drag me hence, from this unhappy shore,
Where first thy malice left me, a poor exile,
Deserted, friendless, and though living, dead
To all mankind. Perish the vile betrayer!
Oh! I have cursed thee often, but the gods
Will never hear the prayers of Philoctetes.

Life and its joys are thine, whilst I, unhappy,
Am but the scorn of thee, and the Atreidae,
Thy haughty masters. Fraud and force compelled thee,
Or thou hadst never sailed with them to Troy.
I lent my willing aid; with seven brave ships
I ploughed the main to serve them. In return
They cast me forth, disgraced me, left me here.
Thou sayst they did it; they impute the crime
To thee. And what will you do with me now?
And whither must I go? What end, what purpose
Could urge thee to it? I am nothing, lost
And dead already. Wherefore—tell me, wherefore?—
Am I not still the same detested burthen,
Loathsome and lame? Again must Philoctetes
Disturb your holy rites? If I am with you
How can you make libations? That was once
Your vile pretence for inhumanity.
Oh! may you perish for the deed! The gods
Will grant it sure, if justice be their care—
And that it is I know. You had not left
Your native soil to seek a wretch like me
Had not some impulse from the powers above,
Spite of yourselves, ordained it. O my country!
And you, O gods! who look upon this deed,
Punish, in pity to me, punish all
The guilty band! Could I behold them perish,
My wounds were nothing; that would heal them all.

LEADER (*to* ULYSSES)

Observe, my lord, what bitterness of soul
His words express; he bends not to misfortune,
But seems to brave it.

ULYSSES

I could answer him,
Were this a time for words; but now, no more
Than this—I act as best befits our purpose.
Where virtue, truth, and justice are required
Ulysses yields to none; I was not born
To be o'ercome, and yet submit to thee.
Let him remain. Thy arrows shall suffice;
We want thee not! Teucer can draw thy bow
As well as thou; myself with equal strength
Can aim the deadly shaft, with equal skill.

What could thy presence do? Let Lemnos keep thee.
Farewell! perhaps the honours once designed
For thee may be reserved to grace Ulysses.

PHILOCTETES
Alas! shall Greece then see my deadliest foe
Adorned with arms which I alone should bear?

ULYSSES
No more! I must be gone.

PHILOCTETES (*to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
Son of Achilles,
Thou wilt not leave me too? I must not lose
Thy converse, thy assistance.

ULYSSES (*to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
Look not on him;
Away, I charge thee! 'Twould be fatal to us.

PHILOCTETES (*to the* CHORUS)
Will you forsake me, friends? Dwells no compassion
Within your breasts for me?

LEADER (*pointing to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
He is our master;
We speak and act but as his will directs.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I know he will upbraid me for this weakness,
But 'tis my nature, and I must consent,
Since Philoctetes asks it. Stay you with him,
Till to the gods our pious prayers we offer,
And all things are prepared for our departure;
Perhaps, meantime, to better thoughts his mind
May turn relenting. We must go. Remember,
When we shall call you, follow instantly.

(NEOPTOLEMUS, *still with the bow in his hands, goes out with* ULYSSES. *The lines in the following scene between* PHILOCTETES *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

PHILOCTETES
O my poor hut! and is it then decreed
Again I come to thee to part no more,
To end my wretched days in this sad cave,

The scene of all my woes? For whither now
Can I betake me? Who will feed, support,
Or cherish Philoctetes? Not a hope
Remains for me. Oh! that th' impetuous storms
Would bear me with them to some distant clime!
For I must perish here.

CHORUS

Unhappy man!
Thou hast provoked thy fate; thyself alone
Art to thyself a foe, to scorn the good,
Which wisdom bids thee take, and choose misfortune.

PHILOCTETES

Wretch that I am, to perish here alone!
Oh! I shall see the face of man no more,
Nor shall my arrows pierce their wingèd prey,
And bring me sustenance! Such vile delusions
Used to betray me! Oh! that pains like those
I feel might reach the author of my woes!

CHORUS

The gods decreed it; we are not to blame.
Heap not thy curses therefore on the guiltless,
But take our friendship.

PHILOCTETES (*pointing to the sea-shore*)

I behold him there;
E'en now I see him laughing me to scorn
On yonder shore, and in his hands the darts
He waves triumphant, which no arms but these
Had ever borne. O my dear glorious treasure!
Hadst thou a mind to feel th' indignity,
How wouldst thou grieve to change thy noble master,
The friend of great Alcides, for a wretch
So vile, so base, so impious as Ulysses!

CHORUS

Justice will ever rule the good man's tongue,
Nor from his lips reproach and bitterness
Invidious flow. Ulysses, by the voice
Of Greece appointed, only sought a friend
To join the common cause, and serve his country.

PHILOCTETES

Hear me, ye winged inhabitants of air,
And you, who on these mountains love to feed,
My savage prey, whom once I could pursue;
Fearful no more of Philoctetes, fly
This hollow rock—I cannot hurt you now;
You need not dread to enter here. Alas!
You now may come, and in your turn regale
On these poor limbs, when I shall be no more.
Where can I hope for food? or who can breathe
This vital air, when life-preserving earth
No longer will assist him?

CHORUS

By the gods!
Let me entreat thee, if thou dost regard
Our master, and thy friend, come to him now,
Whilst thou mayst 'scape this sad calamity;
Who but thyself would choose to be unhappy
That could prevent it?

PHILOCTETES

Oh! you have brought back
Once more the sad remembrance of my griefs;
Why, why, my friends, would you afflict me thus?

CHORUS

Afflict thee—how?

PHILOCTETES

Think you I'll e'er return
To hateful Troy?

CHORUS

We would advise thee to it.

PHILOCTETES

I'll hear no more. Go, leave me!

CHORUS

That we shall
Most gladly. To the ships, my friends; away! (*Going*)
Obey your orders.

PHILOCTETES (*stops them*)
By protecting Jove,
Who hears the suppliant's prayer, do not forsake me!

CHORUS (*returning*)
Be calm then.

PHILOCTETES
O my friends! will you then stay?
Do, by the gods I beg you.

CHORUS
Why that groan?

PHILOCTETES
Alas! I die. My wound, my wound! Hereafter
What can I do? You will not leave me! Hear—

CHORUS
What canst thou say we do not know already?

PHILOCTETES
O'erwhelmed by such a storm of griefs as I am,
You should not thus resent a madman's frenzy.

CHORUS
Comply then and be happy.

PHILOCTETES
Never, never!
Be sure of that. Tho' thunder-bearing Jove
Should with his lightnings blast me, would I go?
No! Let Troy perish, perish all the host
Who sent me here to die; but, O my friends!
Grant me this last request.

CHORUS
What is it? Speak.

PHILOCTETES
A sword, a dart, some instrument of death.

CHORUS
What wouldst thou do?

PHILOCTETES

I'd hack off every limb.
Death, my soul longs for death.

CHORUS

But wherefore is it?

PHILOCTETES

I'll seek my father.

CHORUS

Whither?

PHILOCTETES

In the tomb;
There he must be. O Scyros! O my country!
How could I bear to see thee as I am—
I who had left thy sacred shores to aid
The hateful sons of Greece? O misery!
(*He goes into the cave.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

Ere now we should have taken thee to our ships,
But that advancing this way I behold
Ulysses, and with him Achilles' son.
(NEOPTOLEMUS *enters still carrying the bow; he is followed closely by* ULYSSES.)

ULYSSES

Why this return? Wherefore this haste?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I come
To purge me of my crimes.

ULYSSES

Indeed! What crimes?

NEOPTOLEMUS

My blind obedience to the Grecian host
And to thy counsels.

ULYSSES

Hast thou practised aught
Base or unworthy of thee?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Yes; by art
And vile deceit betrayed th' unhappy.

ULYSSES
Whom?
Alas! what mean you?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Nothing. But the son
Of Poeas—

ULYSSES
Ha! what wouldst thou do? My heart
Misgives me.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I have ta'en his arms, and now—

ULYSSES
Thou wouldst restore them! Speak! Is that thy purpose?
Almighty Jove!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Unjustly should I keep
Another's right?

ULYSSES
Now, by the gods, thou meanst
To mock me! Dost thou not?

NEOPTOLEMUS
If to speak truth
Be mockery.

ULYSSES
And does Achilles' son
Say this to me?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Why force me to repeat
My words so often to thee?

ULYSSES
Once to hear them
Is once indeed too much.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Doubt then no more,
For I have told thee all.

ULYSSES
There are, remember,
There are who may prevent thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Who shall dare
To thwart my purpose?

ULYSSES
All the Grecian host,
And with them, I.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Wise as thou art, Ulysses,
Thou talkst most idly.

ULYSSES
Wisdom is not thine
Either in word or deed.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Know, to be just
Is better far than to be wise.

ULYSSES
But where,
Where is the justice, thus unauthorized,
To give a treasure back thou ow'st to me,
And to my counsels?

NEOPTOLEMUS
I have done a wrong,
And I will try to make atonement for it.

ULYSSES
Dost thou not fear the power of Greece?

NEOPTOLEMUS
I fear
Nor Greece nor thee, when I am doing right.

ULYSSES
'Tis not with Troy then we contend, but thee.

NEOPTOLEMUS

I know not that.

ULYSSES

Seest thou this hand? behold,
It grasps my sword.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Mine is alike prepared,
Nor seeks delay.

ULYSSES

But I will let thee go;
Greece shall know all thy guilt, and shall revenge it.
(ULYSSES *departs.*)

NEOPTOLEMUS

'Twas well determined; always be as wise
As now thou art, and thou mayst live in safety.
(*He approaches the cave and calls.*)
Ho! son of Poeas! Philoctetes, leave
Thy rocky habitation, and come forth.

PHILOCTETES (*from the cave*)

What noise was that? Who calls on Philoctetes?
(*He comes out.*)
Alas! what would you, strangers? Are you come
To heap fresh miseries on me?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Be of comfort,
And hear the tidings which I bring.

PHILOCTETES

I dare not;
Thy flattering tongue hath betrayed me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

And is there then no room for penitence?

PHILOCTETES

Such were thy words, when, seemingly sincere,
Yet meaning ill, thou stolst my arms away.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But now it is not so. I only came
To know if thou art resolute to stay,
Or sail with us.

PHILOCTETES
No more of that; 'tis vain
And useless all.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Art thou then fixed?

PHILOCTETES
I am;
It is impossible to say how firmly.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I thought I could have moved thee, but I've done.

PHILOCTETES
'Tis well thou hast; thy labour had been vain;
For never could my soul esteem the man
Who robbed me of my dearest, best possession,
And now would have me listen to his counsels—
Unworthy offspring of the best of men!
Perish th' Atreidae! perish first Ulysses!
Perish thyself!

NEOPTOLEMUS
Withhold thy imprecations,
And take thy arrows back.

PHILOCTETES
A second time
Wouldst thou deceive me?

NEOPTOLEMUS
By th' almighty power
Of sacred Jove I swear.

PHILOCTETES
O joyful sound!
If thou sayst truly.

NEOPTOLEMUS
Let my actions speak.
Stretch forth thy hand, and take thy arms again.
(*As* NEOPTOLEMUS *gives the bow and arrows to* PHILOCTETES, ULYSSES *suddenly enters.*)

ULYSSES
Witness ye gods! Here, in the name of Greece
And the Atreidae, I forbid it.

PHILOCTETES
Ha!
What voice is that? Ulysses'?

ULYSSES
Aye, 'tis I—
I who perforce will carry thee to Troy
Spite of Achilles' son.

PHILOCTETES
(*He aims an arrow directly at* ULYSSES.)
Not if I aim
This shaft aright.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*laying hold of him*)
Now, by the gods, I beg thee
Stop thy rash hand!

PHILOCTETES
Let go my arm.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I will not.

PHILOCTETES
Shall I not slay my enemy?

NEOPTOLEMUS
Oh, no!
'Twould cast dishonour on us both.
(ULYSSES *hastily departs.*)

PHILOCTETES
Thou knowst,
These Grecian chiefs are loud pretending boasters,
Brave but in tongue, and cowards in the field.

NEOPTOLEMUS
I know it; but remember, I restored
Thy arrows to thee, and thou hast no cause
For rage or for complaint against thy friend.

PHILOCTETES

I own thy goodness. Thou hast shown thyself
Worthy thy birth; no son of Sisyphus,
But of Achilles, who on earth preserved
A fame unspotted, and amongst the dead
Still shines superior, an illustrious shade.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Joyful I thank thee for a father's praise,
And for my own; but listen to my words,
And mark me well. Misfortunes, which the gods
Inflict on mortals, they perforce must bear:
But when, oppressed by voluntary woes,
They make themselves unhappy, they deserve not
Our pity or our pardon. Such art thou.
Thy savage soul, impatient of advice,
Rejects the wholesome counsel of thy friend,
And treats him like a foe; but I will speak,
Jove be my witness! Therefore hear my words,
And grave them in thy heart. The dire disease
Thou long hast suffered is from angry heaven,
Which thus afflicts thee for thy rash approach
To the fell serpent, which on Chrysa's shore
Watched o'er the sacred treasures. Know beside,
That whilst the sun in yonder east shall rise,
Or in the west decline, distempered still
Thou ever shalt remain, unless to Troy
Thy willing mind transport thee. There the sons
Of Aesculapius shall restore thee—there
By my assistance shalt thou conquer Troy.
I know it well; for that prophetic sage,
The Trojan captive Helenus, foretold
It should be so. "Proud Troy (he added then)
This very year must fall; if not, my life
Shall answer for the falsehood." Therefore yield.
Thus to be deemed the first of Grecians, thus
By Poeas' favourite sons to be restored,
And thus marked out the conqueror of Troy,
Is sure distinguished happiness.

PHILOCTETES

O life!
Detested, why wilt thou still keep me here?
Why not dismiss me to the tomb! Alas!

What can I do? How can I disbelieve
My generous friend? I must consent, and yet
Can I do this, and look upon the sun?
Can I behold my friends—will they forgive,
Will they associate with me after this?
And you, ye heavenly orbs that roll around me,
How will ye bear to see me linked with those
Who have destroyed me, e'en the sons of Atreus,
E'en with Ulysses, source of all my woes?
My sufferings past I could forget; but oh!
I dread the woes to come; for well I know
When once the mind's corrupted it brings forth
Unnumbered crimes, and ills to ills succeed.
It moves my wonder much that thou, my friend,
Shouldst thus advise me, whom it ill becomes
To think of Troy. I rather had believed
Thou wouldst have sent me far, far off from those
Who have defrauded thee of thy just right,
And gave thy arms away. Are these the men
Whom thou wouldst serve? whom thou wouldst thus compel me
To save and to defend? It must not be.
Remember, O my son! the solemn oath
Thou gav'st to bear me to my native soil.
Do this, my friend, remain thyself at Scyros,
And leave these wretches to be wretched still.
Thus shalt thou merit double thanks, from me
And from thy father; nor by succour given
To vile betrayers prove thyself as vile.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thou sayst most truly. Yet confide in heaven,
Trust to thy friend, and leave this hated place.

PHILOCTETES

Leave it! For whom? For Troy and the Atreidae?
These wounds forbid it.

NEOPTOLEMUS

They shall all be healed,
Where I will carry thee.

PHILOCTETES

An idle tale
Thou tellst me, surely; dost thou not?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I speak
What best may serve us both.

PHILOCTETES

But, speaking thus,
Dost thou not fear th' offended gods?

NEOPTOLEMUS

Why fear them?
Can I offend the gods by doing good?

PHILOCTETES

What good? To whom? To me or to th' Atreidae?

NEOPTOLEMUS

I am thy friend, and therefore would persuade thee.

PHILOCTETES

And therefore give me to my foes.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas!
Let not misfortunes thus transport thy soul
To rage and bitterness.

PHILOCTETES

Thou wouldst destroy me.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Thou knowst me not.

PHILOCTETES

I know th' Atreidae well,
Who left me here.

NEOPTOLEMUS

They did; yet they perhaps,
E'en they, O Philoctetes! may preserve thee.

PHILOCTETES

I never will to Troy.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What's to be done?
Since I can ne'er persuade thee, I submit;
Live on in misery.

PHILOCTETES

Then let me suffer;
Suffer I must; but, oh! perform thy promise;
Think on thy plighted faith, and guard me home
Instant, my friend, nor ever call back Troy
To my remembrance; I have felt enough
From Troy already.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Let us go; prepare!

PHILOCTETES

O glorious sound!

NEOPTOLEMUS

Bear thyself up.

PHILOCTETES

I will,
If possible.

NEOPTOLEMUS

But how shall I escape
The wrath of Greece?

PHILOCTETES

Oh! think not of it.

NEOPTOLEMUS

What
If they should waste my kingdom?

PHILOCTETES

I'll be there.

NEOPTOLEMUS

Alas! what canst thou do?

PHILOCTETES

And with these arrows
Of my Alcides—

NEOPTOLEMUS

Ha! What sayst thou?

PHILOCTETES

Drive
Thy foes before me. Not a Greek shall dare
Approach thy borders.

NEOPTOLEMUS

If thou wilt do this,
Salute the earth, and instant hence. Away!

(HERCULES *appears from above, and speaks as he moves forward.*)

HERCULES

Stay, son of Poeas! Lo to thee 'tis given
Once more to see and hear thy loved Alcides,
Who for thy sake hath left yon heavenly mansions,
And comes to tell thee the decrees of Jove;
To turn thee from the paths thou meanst to tread,
And guide thy footsteps right. Therefore attend.
Thou knowst what toils, what labours I endured,
Ere I by virtue gained immortal fame;
Thou too like me by toils must rise to glory—
Thou too must suffer, ere thou canst be happy;
Hence with thy friend to Troy, where honour calls,
Where health awaits thee—where, by virtue raised
To highest rank, and leader of the war,
Paris, its hateful author, shalt thou slay,
Lay waste proud Troy, and send thy trophies home,
Thy valour's due reward, to glad thy sire
On Oeta's top. The gifts which Greece bestows
Must thou reserve to grace my funeral pile,
And be a monument to after-ages
Of these all-conquering arms. Son of Achilles
(*Turning to* NEOPTOLEMUS)
(For now to thee I speak), remember this,
Without his aid thou canst not conquer Troy,
Nor Philoctetes without thee succeed;
Go then, and, like two lions in the field
Roaming for prey, guard ye each other well;
My Aesculapius will I send e'en now
To heal thy wounds. Then go, and conquer Troy;
But when you lay the vanquished city waste,
Be careful that you venerate the gods;
For far above all other gifts doth Jove,
Th' almighty father, hold true piety;

Whether we live or die, that still survives
Beyond the reach of fate, and is immortal.

PHILOCTETES (*chanting*)
Once more to let me hear that wished-for voice,
To see thee after so long time, was bliss
I could not hope for. Oh! I will obey
Thy great commands most willingly.

NEOPTOLEMUS (*chanting*)
And I.

HERCULES (*chanting*)
Delay not then. For lo! a prosperous wind
Swells in thy sail. The time invites. Adieu!
(HERCULES *disappears above.*)

PHILOCTETES (*chanting*)
I will but pay my salutations here,
And instantly depart. To thee, my cave,
Where I so long have dwelt, I bid farewell!
And you, ye nymphs, who on the watery plains
Deign to reside, farewell! Farewell the noise
Of beating waves, which I so oft have heard
From the rough sea, which by the black winds driven
O'erwhelmed me, shivering. Oft th' Hermaean mount
Echoed my plaintive voice, by wintry storms
Afflicted, and returned me groan for groan.
Now, ye fresh fountains, each Lycaean spring,
I leave you now. Alas! I little thought
To leave you ever. And thou sea-girt isle,
Lemnos, farewell! Permit me to depart
By thee unblamed, and with a prosperous gale
To go where fate demands, where kindest friends
By counsel urge me, where all-powerful Jove
In his unerring wisdom hath decreed.

CHORUS (*chanting*)
Let us be gone, and to the ocean nymphs
Our humble prayers prefer, that they would all
Propitious smile, and grant us safe return.

NOTE ON PHILOCTETES

THOMAS FRANCKLIN, whose translation is printed herewith, was an English clergyman and Greek scholar of the eighteenth century. His translation of Sophocles, first published in 1759, has enjoyed an excellent reputation and is by far the best of the eighteenth century versions. Some of his renderings might by the captious critic be called too "free," yet the translations as a whole reproduce very well many of the essential qualities of the original. Francklin has followed the convention of his times in using the Roman forms of certain proper names. For example, Ulysses and Hercules appear throughout for Odysseus and Heracles.

VII
OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

Characters in the Play

Oedipus
Antigone, Ismene } *his daughters*
A Man of Colonus
Theseus, *King of Athens*
Creon, *of Thebes*
Polyneices, *the elder son of* Oedipus
A Messenger
Chorus of Elders of Colonus

INTRODUCTION

IN ALL probability the last play to come from the hand of Sophocles, the *Oedipus at Colonus* is regarded by many critics as his greatest work. The poet at the end of his life returns to the Theban saga in order to complete his interpretation of Oedipus' story. Perhaps inspired by a local legend that Oedipus was buried at Colonus where the Eumenides were worshipped, Sophocles makes the last hours and death of Oedipus the subject-matter of his play.

About twenty years have elapsed since the fatal day when the Theban king discovered the truth about himself and his past. At the close of *Oedipus the King,* Creon insisted that the oracle should decide what ought to be done with the ill-fated sovereign, who was pleading to be sent into exile. Evidently no oracle was consulted, for Oedipus continued to live in Thebes while Creon held the royal power as regent. As time passed Oedipus became adjusted to his position, and desired to spend his remaining years of life in his native city. But certain folk in the city felt that the presence of the ex-king still constituted a pollution in their land, and consequently, urged on by Creon, decreed that he should be exiled. His two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, did nothing on their father's behalf to prevent the decree from being passed. So the aged Oedipus left Thebes, guided and cared for solely by his loyal daughter, Antigone.

After the departure of their father the two brothers at first seemed content to allow Creon to rule, but presently changed their view, and strove against each other for the throne. Eteocles conquered, and Polyneices, now an exile, went to Argos, married a daughter of the king, Adrastus, and as our play opens is on the point of leading an Argive host against Thebes, in an attempt to take the power from Eteocles. But now a new element in the situation has appeared. An oracle has reported to Thebes that she would prosper only if Oedipus lay buried in the Theban land, and that if he were interred in Attica, Athens would prosper and Thebes suffer. When the action of the play begins, the aged Oedipus possesses within him this strange power to render fortunate the land wherein his grave will lie.

Notable among the play's claims to distinction is the fact that in it

Sophocles reaches perhaps his greatest poetic heights. He has seen fit to use the *commos* more frequently than is normal. In addition he has incorporated in the choruses several brilliant lyric passages, the most famous of which is the great ode which sings the praises of Colonus and Attica (lines 668 ff.). Likewise the subordinate characters, as is usual with Sophocles, are excellently done. They are, however, individual to this play, and cannot be connected with their characterizations in Sophocles' other tragedies based on the Theban saga. For example, Creon here is a thorough-going scoundrel, whereas in the *Antigone,* he qualifies in many ways as an Aristotelian "tragic hero." This point, however, does not apply to the character of Oedipus which naturally rivets our attention. He still has many of his old familiar traits though he has clearly aged and become more gentle. Yet his intensity when he bitterly curses his sons carries us straight back to the times before his downfall.

Oedipus' characterization with its culmination in his mysterious death is most significant, because in it lies not only the larger meaning of this play, but also the terms in which Sophocles tends to resolve as finally as possible for himself the problems of moral responsibility and the nature of God's ways to man, those very issues with which he had been continually preoccupied throughout his creative career. Although Oedipus before his death has an unmitigated strain of hardness in his nature when he is faced with the conduct of his sons, nevertheless at the very end Sophocles presents a figure somehow or other mysteriously purified by his suffering. Within Oedipus now by the grace of some divine gift are the seeds of blessing. He has become a kind of vehicle through which the power behind the universe will act. In the intensely dramatic scene, immense in scope and impact, when Oedipus moves slowly from the stage, unguided, but lighted by an inward light, Sophoclean tragedy seems to sum itself up. Before us is a noble high-hearted man, who has suffered, though innocent in intention. He portrays man's dignity, the power of his will, his walking under God, the limits to which his understanding can attain—mystically illuminated at last in the triumph of death.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

(SCENE:—*At Colonus in Attica, a little more than a mile north-west of the Acropolis at Athens. The back-scene shows the grove sacred to the Erinyes or Furies, there worshipped under the propitiatory name of the Eumenides, or Kindly Powers. The grove is luxuriant with laurel, olive, and vine. Near the middle of the stage is seen a rock, affording a seat which is supposed to be just within the bounds of the grove. The hero Colonus is perhaps represented by a statue on the stage.*

The blind OEDIPUS, *who is conceived as coming into Attica from the west or north-west, enters on the spectators' left, led by* ANTIGONE. *He is old and way-worn, his haggard face bearing the traces of the self-inflicted wounds. The garb of both the wanderers betokens indigence and hardship. After replying to his first questions, his daughter leads him to the rocky seat.*)

OEDIPUS

DAUGHTER of the blind old man, to what region have we come, Antigone, or what city of men? Who will entertain the wandering Oedipus to-day with scanty gifts? Little crave I, and win yet less than that little, and therewith am content; for patience is the lesson of suffering, and of the years in our long fellowship, and lastly of a noble mind.—My child, if thou seest any resting-place, whether on profane ground or by groves of the gods, stay me and set me down, that we may inquire where we are: for we stand in need to learn as strangers of denizens, and to perform their bidding.

ANTIGONE

Father, toil-worn Oedipus, the towers that guard the city, to judge by sight, are far off; and this place is sacred, to all seeming,—thick-set with laurel, olive, vine; and in its heart a feathered choir of nightingales makes music. So sit thee here on this unhewn stone; thou hast travelled a long way for an old man.

OEDIPUS

Seat me, then, and watch over the blind.

ANTIGONE

If time can teach, I need not to learn that.

OEDIPUS

Canst thou tell me, now, where we have arrived?

ANTIGONE

Athens I know, but not this place.

OEDIPUS

Aye, so much every wayfarer told us.

ANTIGONE

Well, shall I go and learn how the spot is called?

OEDIPUS

Yes, child,—if indeed 'tis habitable.

ANTIGONE

Nay, inhabited it surely is;—but I think there is no need;—yonder I see a man near us.

OEDIPUS

Hitherward moving and setting forth?

ANTIGONE

Nay, he is at our side already. Speak as the moment prompts thee, for the man is here.

(*A* STRANGER, *a man of Colonus, enters.*)

OEDIPUS

Stranger, hearing from this maiden, who hath sight for herself and for me, that thou hast drawn nigh with timely quest for the solving of our doubts—

STRANGER

Now, ere thou question me at large, quit this seat; for thou art on ground which 'tis not lawful to tread.

OEDIPUS

And what is this ground? To what deity sacred?

STRANGER

Ground inviolable, whereon none may dwell: for the dread goddesses hold it, the daughters of Earth and Darkness.

OEDIPUS

Who may they be, whose awful name I am to hear and invoke?

STRANGER

The all-seeing Eumenides the folk here would call them: but other names please otherwhere.

OEDIPUS

Then graciously may they receive their suppliant! for nevermore will I depart from my rest in this land.

STRANGER

What means this?

OEDIPUS

'Tis the watchword of my fate.

STRANGER

Nay, for my part, I dare not remove thee without warrant from the city, ere I report what I am doing.

OEDIPUS

Now for the gods' love, stranger, refuse me not, hapless wanderer that I am, the knowledge for which I sue to thee.

STRANGER

Speak, and from me thou shalt find no refusal.

OEDIPUS

What, then, is the place that we have entered?

STRANGER

All that *I* know, thou shalt learn from my mouth. This whole place is sacred; awful Poseidon holds it, and therein is the fire-fraught god, the Titan Prometheus; but as for the spot whereon thou treadest, 'tis called the Brazen Threshold of this land, the stay of Athens; and the neighbouring fields claim yon knight Colonus for their primal lord, and all the people bear his name in common for their own. Such, thou mayest know, stranger, are these haunts, not honoured in story, but rather in the life that loves them.

OEDIPUS

Are there indeed dwellers in this region?

STRANGER

Yea, surely, the namesakes of yonder god.

OEDIPUS

Have they a king? Or doth speech rest with the folk?

STRANGER

These parts are ruled by the king in the city.

OEDIPUS

And who is thus sovereign in counsel and in might?

STRANGER

Theseus he is called, son of Aegeus who was before him.

OEDIPUS

Could a messenger go for him from among you?

STRANGER

With what aim to speak, or to prepare his coming?

OEDIPUS

That by small service he may find a great gain.

STRANGER

And what help can be from one who sees not?

OEDIPUS

In all that I speak there shall be sight.

STRANGER

Mark me now, friend—I would not have thee come to harm,—for thou art noble, if one may judge by thy looks, leaving thy fortune aside;—stay here, e'en where I found thee, till I go and tell these things to the folk on this spot,—not in the town: they will decide for thee whether thou shalt abide or retire.

(*The* STRANGER *departs.*)

OEDIPUS

My child, say, is the stranger gone?

ANTIGONE

He is gone, and so thou canst utter what thou wilt, father, in quietness, as knowing that I alone am near.

OEDIPUS

Queens of dread aspect, since your seat is the first in this land whereat I have bent the knee, show not yourselves ungracious to Phoebus or to myself; who, when he proclaimed that doom of many woes, spake of *this* as a rest for me after long years,—on reaching my goal in a land where I should find a seat of the Awful Goddesses, and a hospitable shelter,—even that there I should close my weary life, with benefits, through my having dwelt therein, for mine hosts, but ruin for those who sent me forth

—who drove me away. And he went on to warn me that signs of these things should come, in earthquake, or in thunder, haply, or in the lightning of Zeus.

Now I perceive that in this journey some faithful omen from you hath surely led me home to this grove: never else could I have met with you, first of all, in my wanderings,—I, the austere, with you who delight not in wine,—or taken this solemn seat not shaped by man.

Then, goddesses, according to the word of Apollo, give me at last some way to accomplish and close my course,—unless, perchance, I seem beneath your grace, thrall that I am evermore to woes the sorest on the earth. Hear, sweet daughters of primeval Darkness! Hear, thou that art called the city of great Pallas,—Athens, of all cities most honoured! Pity this poor wraith of Oedipus,—for verily 'tis the man of old no more.

ANTIGONE

Hush! Here come some aged men, I wot, to spy out thy resting-place.

OEDIPUS

I will be mute,—and do thou hide me in the grove, apart from the road, till I learn how these men will speak; for in knowledge is the safeguard of our course.

(OEDIPUS *and* ANTIGONE *withdraw into the grove. The* CHORUS OF ELDERS OF COLONUS *enter the orchestra, from the right of the spectators, as if in eager search.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Give heed—who was he, then? Where lodges he?—whither hath he rushed from this place, insolent, he, above all who live? Scan the ground, look well, urge the quest in every part.

A wanderer that old man must have been,—a wanderer, not a dweller in the land; else never would he have advanced into this untrodden grove of the maidens with whom none may strive, whose name we tremble to speak, by whom we pass with eyes turned away, moving our lips, without sound or word, in still devotion.

But now 'tis rumoured that one hath come who in no wise reveres them; and him I cannot yet discern, though I look round all the holy place, nor wot I where to find his lodging.

(OEDIPUS *steps forward, with* ANTIGONE, *from his place of concealment in the grove.*)

OEDIPUS

systema 1

Behold the man whom ye seek! for in sound is my sight, as the saying hath it.

CHORUS

O! O!
Dread to see, and dread to hear!

OEDIPUS

Regard me not, I entreat you, as a lawless one.

CHORUS

Zeus defend us! who may the old man be?

OEDIPUS

Not wholly of the best fortune, that ye should envy him, O guardians of this land!—'Tis plain: else would I not be walking thus by the eyes of others, and buoying my strength upon weakness.

CHORUS

antistrophe 1

Alas! wast thou sightless e'en from thy birth? Evil have been thy days, and many, to all seeming; but at least, if I can help, thou shalt not add this curse to thy doom. Too far thou goest—too far! But, lest thy rash steps intrude on the sward of yonder voiceless glade, where the bowl of water blends its stream with the flow of honied offerings (be thou well ware of such trespass, unhappy stranger) retire,—withdraw!—A wide space parts us: hearest thou, toil-worn wanderer? If thou hast aught to say in converse with us, leave forbidden ground, and speak where 'tis lawful for all; but, till then, refrain.

OEDIPUS

systema 2

Daughter, to what counsel shall we incline?

ANTIGONE

My father, we must conform us to the customs of the land, yielding, where 'tis meet, and hearkening.

OEDIPUS

Then give me thy hand.

ANTIGONE

'Tis laid in thine.

OEDIPUS

Strangers, oh let me not suffer wrong when I have trusted in you, and have passed from my refuge!

CHORUS

strophe 2

Never, old man, never shall any one remove thee from this place of rest against thy will.

(OEDIPUS *now begins to move forward.*)

OEDIPUS (*pausing in his gradual advance*)

Further, then?

CHORUS

Come still further.

OEDIPUS (*having advanced another step*)

Further?

CHORUS

Lead him onward, maiden, for thou understandest.

[*A verse for* ANTIGONE, *a verse for* OEDIPUS, *and then another verse for* ANTIGONE, *seem to have been lost here.*]

ANTIGONE

Come, follow me this way with thy dark steps, father, as I lead thee.

[*Here has been lost a verse for* OEDIPUS.]

CHORUS

A stranger in a strange land, ah, hapless one, incline thy heart to abhor that which the city holds in settled hate, and to reverence what she loves!

OEDIPUS

systema 3

Lead me thou, then, child, to a spot where I may speak and listen within piety's domain, and let us not wage war with necessity.

(*Moving forward, he now sets foot on a platform of rock at the verge of the grove.*)

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

There!—bend not thy steps beyond that floor of native rock.

OEDIPUS

Thus far?

CHORUS

Enough, I tell thee.

OEDIPUS

Shall I sit down?

CHORUS

Yea, move sideways and crouch low on the edge of the rock.

ANTIGONE

Father, this is my task: to quiet step.

OEDIPUS

Ah me! ah me!

ANTIGONE

Knit step, and lean thy aged frame upon my loving arm.

OEDIPUS

Woe for the doom of a dark soul!

(ANTIGONE *seats him on the rock.*)

CHORUS

Ah, hapless one, since now thou hast ease, speak,—whence art thou sprung? In what name art thou led on thy weary way? What is the fatherland whereof thou hast to tell us?

OEDIPUS

Strangers, I am an exile—but forbear . . .

CHORUS

What is this that thou forbiddest, old man?

OEDIPUS

—forbear, forbear to ask me who I am;—seek—probe—no further!

CHORUS

What means this?

OEDIPUS

Dread the birth . . .

CHORUS

Speak!

OEDIPUS (*to* ANTIGONE)

My child—alas!—what shall I say?

CHORUS

What is thy lineage, stranger,—speak!—and who thy sire?

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!—What will become of me, my child?

ANTIGONE

Speak,—for thou art driven to the verge.

OEDIPUS

Then speak I will—I have no way to hide it.

CHORUS

Ye twain make a long delay—come, haste thee!

OEDIPUS

Know ye a son of Laius . . . O! . . . (*The* CHORUS *utter a cry*) . . . and the race of the Labdacidae? . . .

CHORUS

O Zeus! . . .

OEDIPUS

The hapless Oedipus? . . .

CHORUS

THOU art he?

OEDIPUS

Have no fear of any words that I speak—

(*The* CHORUS *drown his voice with a great shout of execration, half turning away, and holding their mantels before their eyes.*)

OEDIPUS

Unhappy that I am! . . . (*The clamour of the* CHORUS *continues*) . . . Daughter, what is about to befall?

CHORUS

Out with you! forth from the land!

OEDIPUS

And thy promise—to what fulfilment wilt thou bring it?

CHORUS

No man is visited by fate if he requites deeds which were first done to himself; deceit on the one part matches deceits on the other, and gives pain, instead of benefit, for reward. And thou—back with

thee! out from these seats! avaunt! away from my land with all speed, lest thou fasten some heavier burden on my city!

ANTIGONE

Strangers of reverent soul, since ye have not borne with mine aged father,—knowing, as ye do, the rumour of his unpurposed deeds,—pity, at least, my hapless self, I implore you, who supplicate you for my sire alone,—supplicate you with eyes that can still look on your own, even as though I were sprung from your own blood, that the sufferer may find compassion.

On you, as on a god, we depend in our misery. Nay, hear us! grant the boon for which we scarce dare hope! By everything sprung from you that ye hold dear, I implore you, yea, by child—by wife, or treasure, or god! Look well and thou wilt not find the mortal who, if a god should lead him on, could escape.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Nay, be thou sure, daughter of Oedipus, we pity thee and him alike for your fortune; but, dreading the judgment of the gods, we could not say aught beyond what hath now been said to thee.

OEDIPUS

What good comes, then, of repute or fair fame, if it ends in idle breath; seeing that Athens, as men say, has the perfect fear of Heaven, and the power, above all cities, to shelter the vexed stranger, and the power, above all, to succour him?

And where find I these things, when, after making me rise up from these rocky seats, ye then drive me from the land, afraid of my name alone? Not, surely, afraid of my person or of mine acts; since mine acts, at least, have been in suffering rather than doing—were it seemly that I should tell you the story of my mother or my sire, by reason whereof ye dread me—that know I full well.

And yet in *nature* how was I evil? I, who was but requiting a wrong, so that, had I been acting with knowledge, even then I could not be accounted wicked; but, as it was, all unknowing went I—whither I went—while they who wronged me knowingly sought my ruin.

Wherefore, strangers, I beseech you by the gods, even as ye made me leave my seat, so protect me, and do not, while ye honour the gods, refuse to give those gods their due; but rather deem that they look on the god-fearing among men, and on the godless, and that never yet hath escape been found for an impious mortal on the earth.

With the help of those gods, spare to cloud the bright fame of Athens by ministering to unholy deeds; but, as yet have received the suppliant

under your pledge, rescue me and guard me to the end; nor scorn me when ye look on this face unlovely to behold: for I have come to you as one sacred, and pious, and fraught with comfort for this people. But when the master is come, whosoever he be that is your chief, then shall ye hear and know all; meanwhile in no wise show yourself false.

LEADER

The thoughts urged on thy part, old man, must needs move awe; they have been set forth in words not light; but I am content that the rulers of our country should judge in this cause.

OEDIPUS

And where, strangers, is the lord of this realm?

LEADER

He is at the city of his father in our land; and the messenger who sent us hither hath gone to fetch him.

OEDIPUS

Think ye that he will have any regard or care for the blind man, so as to come hither himself?

LEADER

Yea, surely, so soon as he learns thy name.

OEDIPUS

Who is there to bring him that message?

LEADER

The way is long, and many rumours from wayfarers are wont to go abroad; when he hears them, he will soon be with us, fear not. For thy name, old man, hath been mightily noised through all lands; so that, even if he is taking his ease, and slow to move, when he hears of *thee* he will arrive with speed.

OEDIPUS

Well, may he come with a blessing to his own city, as to me!—What good man is not his own friend?

ANTIGONE

O Zeus! what shall I say, what shall I think, my father?

OEDIPUS

What is it, Antigone, my child?

ANTIGONE

I see a woman coming towards us, mounted on a colt of Etna; she wears a Thessalian bonnet to screen her face from the sun. What shall I say? Is it she, or is it not? Doth fancy cheat me? Yes—no—I cannot tell —ah me! It is no other—yes!—she greets me with bright glances as she draws nigh, and shows that Ismene, and no other, is before me.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou, my child?

ANTIGONE

That I see thy daughter and my sister;—thou canst know her straightway by her voice.

(ISMENE *enters, attended by one servant.*)

ISMENE

Father and sister, names most sweet to me! How hardly have I found you! and now I scarce can see you for my tears.

OEDIPUS

My child, thou hast come?

ISMENE

Ah, father, sad is thy fate to see!

OEDIPUS

Thou art with us, my child!

ISMENE

And it hath cost me toil.

OEDIPUS

Touch me, my daughter!

ISMENE

I give a hand to each.

OEDIPUS

Ah, children—ah, ye sisters!

ISMENE

Alas, twice-wretched life!

OEDIPUS

Her life and mine?

ISMENE

And mine, hapless, with you twain.

OEDIPUS

Child, and why hast thou come?

ISMENE

Through care, father, for thee.

OEDIPUS

Through longing to see me?

ISMENE

Yes, and to bring thee tidings by mine own mouth,—with the only faithful servant that I had.

OEDIPUS

And where are the young men thy brothers at our need?

ISMENE

They are—where they are: 'tis their dark hour.

OEDIPUS

O, true image of the ways of Egypt that they show in their spirit and their life! For there the men sit weaving in the house, but the wives go forth to win the daily bread.[1] And in your case, my daughters, those to whom these toils belonged keep the house at home like girls, while ye, in their stead, bear your hapless father's burdens.

One, from the time when her tender age was past and she came to a woman's strength, hath ever been the old man's guide in weary wanderings, oft roaming, hungry and barefoot, through the wild wood, oft sore-vexed by rains and scorching heat,—but regarding not the comforts of home, if so her father should have tendance.

And thou, my child, in former days camest forth, bringing thy father, unknown of the Cadmeans, all the oracles that had been given touching Oedipus; and thou didst take on thee the office of a faithful watcher in my behalf, when I was being driven from the land. And now what new tidings hast thou brought thy father, Ismene? On what mission hast thou set forth from home? For thou comest not empty-handed, well I wot, or without some word of fear for me.

ISMENE

The sufferings that I bore, father, in seeking where thou wast living, I will pass by; I would not renew the pain in the recital. But the ills that now beset thine ill-fated sons,—'tis of these that I have come to tell thee.

At first it was their desire that the throne should be left to Creon, and the city spared pollution, when they thought calmly on the blight of the race from of old, and how it hath clung to thine ill-starred house. But

now, moved by some god and by a sinful mind, an evil rivalry hath seized them, thrice infatuate!—to grasp at rule and kingly power.

And the hot-brained youth, the younger born, hath deprived the elder, Polyneices, of the throne, and hath driven him from his fatherland.[2] But he, as the general rumour saith among us, hath gone, an exile, to the hill-girt Argos, and is taking unto him a new kinship, and warriors for his friends,—as deeming that Argos shall soon possess the Cadmean land in honour, or lift that land's praise to the stars.

These are no vain words, my father, but deeds terrible; and where the gods will have pity on thy griefs, I cannot tell.

OEDIPUS

What, hadst thou come to hope that the gods would ever look on me for my deliverance?

ISMENE

Yea, mine is that hope, father, from the present oracles.

OEDIPUS

What are they? What hath been prophesied, my child?

ISMENE

That thou shalt yet be desired, alive and dead, by the men of that land, for their welfare's sake.

OEDIPUS

And who could have good of such an one as I?

ISMENE

Their power, 'tis said, comes to be in *thy* hand.

OEDIPUS

When I am nought, in that hour, then, I am a man?

ISMENE

Yea, for the gods lift thee now, but before they were working thy ruin.

OEDIPUS

'Tis little to lift age, when youth was ruined.

ISMENE

Well, know, at least, that Creon will come to thee in this cause—and rather soon than late.

OEDIPUS

With what purpose, daughter? Expound to me.

ISMENE

To plant thee near the Cadmean land, so that they may have thee in their grasp, but thou mayest not set foot on their borders.

OEDIPUS

And how can I advantage them while I rest beyond their gates?

ISMENE

Thy tomb hath a curse for them, if all be not well with it.

OEDIPUS

It needs no god to help our wit so far.

ISMENE

Well, therefore they would fain acquire thee as a neighbour, in a place where thou shalt not be thine own master.

OEDIPUS

Will they also shroud me in Theban dust?

ISMENE

Nay, the guilt of a kinsman's blood debars thee, father.

OEDIPUS

Then never shall they become my masters.

ISMENE

Some day, then, this shall be a grief for the Cadmeans.

OEDIPUS

In what conjuncture of events, my child?

ISMENE

By force of thy wrath, when they take their stand at thy tomb.

OEDIPUS

And who hath told thee what thou tellest, my child?

ISMENE

Sacred envoys, from the Delphian hearth.

OEDIPUS

And Phoebus hath indeed spoken thus concerning me?

ISMENE

So say the men who have come back to Thebes.

OEDIPUS

Hath either of my sons, then, heard this?

ISMENE

Yea, both have heard, and know it well.

OEDIPUS

And then those base ones, aware of this, held the kingship dearer than the wish to recall me?

ISMENE

It grieves me to hear that,—but I must bear it.

OEDIPUS

Then may the gods quench not their fated strife, and may it become mine to decide this warfare whereto they are now setting their hands, spear against spear! For then neither should he abide who now holds the sceptre and the throne, nor should the banished one ever return; seeing that when I, their sire, was being thrust so shamefully from my country, they hindered not, nor defended me; no, they saw me sent forth homeless, they heard my doom of exile cried aloud.

Thou wilt say that it was mine own wish then, and that the city meetly granted me that boon. No, verily: for in that first day, when my soul was seething, and my darling wish was for death, aye, death by stoning, no one was found to help me in that desire: but after a time, when all my anguish was now assuaged, and when I began to feel that my wrath had run too far in punishing those past errors,—then it was that the city, on her part, went about to drive me perforce from the land—after all that time; and my sons, when they might have brought help—the sons to the sire—would not do it: no—for lack of one little word from them, I was left to wander, an outcast and a beggar evermore.

'Tis to these sisters, girls as they are, that, so far as nature enables them, I owe my daily food, and a shelter in the land, and the offices of kinship; the brothers have bartered their sire for a throne, and sceptred sway, and rule of the realm. Nay, never shall they win Oedipus for an ally, nor shall good ever come to them from this reign at Thebes; that know I, when I hear this maiden's oracles, and meditate on the old prophecies stored in mine own mind, which Phoebus hath fulfilled for me at last.

Therefore let them send Creon to seek me, and whoso beside is mighty in Thebes. For if ye, strangers,—with the championship of the dread goddesses who dwell among your folk,—are willing to succour, ye shall procure a great deliverer for this State, and troubles for my foes.

LEADER

Right worthy art thou of compassion, Oedipus, thou, and these maidens; and since to this plea thou addest thy power to save our land, I fain would advise thee for thy weal.

OEDIPUS

Kind sir, be sure, then, that I will obey in all,—stand thou my friend.

LEADER

Now make atonement to these deities, to whom thou hast first come, and on whose ground thou hast trespassed.

OEDIPUS

With what rites? instruct me, strangers.

LEADER

First, from a perennial spring fetch holy drink-offerings, borne in clean hands.

OEDIPUS

And when I have gotten this pure draught?

LEADER

Bowls there are, the work of a cunning craftsman: crown their edges and the handles at either brim.

OEDIPUS

With branches, or woollen cloths, or in what wise?

LEADER

Take the freshly-shorn wool of an ewe-lamb.

OEDIPUS

Good; and then,—to what last rite shall I proceed?

LEADER

Pour thy drink-offerings, with thy face to the dawn.

OEDIPUS

With these vessels whereof thou speakest shall I pour them?

LEADER

Yea, in three streams; but empty the last vessel wholly.

OEDIPUS

Wherewith shall I fill this, ere I set it? Tell me this also.

LEADER

With water and honey; but bring no wine thereto.

OEDIPUS

And when the ground under the dark shade hath drunk of these?

LEADER

Lay on it thrice nine sprays of olive with both thine hands, and make this prayer the while.

OEDIPUS

The prayer I fain would hear—'tis of chief moment.

LEADER

That, as we call them Benign Powers, with hearts benign they may receive the suppliant for saving: be this the prayer,—thine own, or his who prays for thee; speak inaudibly, and lift not up thy voice; then retire, without looking behind. Thus do, and I would be bold to stand by thee; but otherwise, stranger, I would fear for thee.

OEDIPUS

Daughters, hear ye these strangers, who dwell near?

ANTIGONE

We have listened; and do thou bid us what to do.

OEDIPUS

I cannot go; for I am disabled by lack of strength and lack of sight, evils twain. But let one of you two go and do these things. For I think that one soul suffices to pay this debt for ten thousand, if it come with good will to the shrine. Act, then, with speed; yet leave me not solitary; for the strength would fail me to move without help or guiding hand.

ISMENE

Then I will go to perform the rite; but where I am to find the spot—this I fain would learn.

LEADER

On the further side of this grove, maiden. And if thou hast need of aught, there is a guardian of the place, who will direct thee.

ISMENE

So to my task:—but thou, Antigone, watch our father here. In parents' cause, if toil there be, we must not reck of toil.

(ISMENE *departs.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

Dread is it, stranger, to arouse the old grief that hath so long been laid to rest: and yet I yearn to hear . . .

OEDIPUS

What now? . . .

CHORUS

—of that grievous anguish, found cureless, wherewith thou hast wrestled.

OEDIPUS

By thy kindness for a guest, bare not the shame that I have suffered!

CHORUS

Seeing, in sooth, that the tale is wide-spread, and in no wise wanes, I am fain, friend, to hear it aright.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CHORUS

Be content, I pray thee!

OEDIPUS

Alas, alas!

CHORUS

Grant my wish, as I have granted thine in its fulness.

OEDIPUS

antistrophe 1

I have suffered misery, strangers,—suffered it through unwitting deeds, and of those acts—be Heaven my witness!—no part was of mine own choice.

CHORUS

But in what regard?

OEDIPUS

By an evil wedlock, Thebes bound me, all unknowing, to the bride that was my curse. . . .

CHORUS

Can it be, as I hear, that thou madest thy mother the partner of thy bed, for its infamy?

OEDIPUS

Woe is me! Cruel as death, strangers, are these words in mine ears; —but those maidens, begotten of me—

CHORUS

What wilt thou say?—

OEDIPUS

—two daughters—two curses—

CHORUS

O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

—sprang from the travail of the womb that bore me.

CHORUS

strophe 2

These, then, are at once thine offspring, and . . .

OEDIPUS

—yea, very sisters of their sire.

CHORUS

Oh, horror!

OEDIPUS

Horror indeed—yea, horrors untold sweep back upon my soul!

CHORUS

Thou hast suffered—

OEDIPUS

Suffered woes dread to bear.—

CHORUS

Thou hast sinned—

OEDIPUS

No wilful sin—

CHORUS

How?—

OEDIPUS

A gift was given to me—O, broken-hearted that I am, would I had never won from Thebes that meed for having served her!

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

Wretch! How then? . . . thine hand shed blood? . . .

OEDIPUS

Wherefore this? What wouldst thou learn?

CHORUS

A father's blood?

OEDIPUS

Oh! oh! a second stab—wound on wound!

CHORUS

Slayer!

OEDIPUS

Aye, slayer—yet have I a plea—

CHORUS

What canst thou plead?—

OEDIPUS

—a plea in justice. . . .

CHORUS

What? . . .

OEDIPUS

Ye shall hear it; they whom I slew would have taken mine own life: stainless before the law, void of malice, have I come unto this pass!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lo, yonder cometh our prince, Theseus son of Aegeus, at thy voice, to do the part whereunto he was summoned.

(THESEUS *enters from the right of the spectators.*)

THESEUS

Hearing from many in time past concerning the cruel marring of thy sight, I have recognised thee, son of Laius; and now, through hearsay in this my coming, I have the fuller certainty. For thy garb, and that hapless face, alike assure me of thy name; and in all compassion would I ask thee, ill-fated Oedipus, what is thy suit to Athens or to me that thou hast taken thy place here, thou and the hapless maiden at thy side. Declare it; dire indeed must be the fortune told by thee, from which I should stand aloof; who know that I myself also was reared in exile, like to thine, and

in strange lands wrestled with perils to my life, as no man beside. Never, then, would I turn aside from a stranger, such as thou art now, or refuse to aid in his deliverance: for well know I that I am a man, and that in the morrow my portion is no greater than thine.

OEDIPUS

Theseus, thy nobleness hath in brief words shown such grace that for me there is need to say but little. Thou hast rightly said who I am, from what sire I spring, from what land I have come; and so nought else remains for me but to speak my desire,—and the tale is told.

THESEUS

Even so—speak that—I fain would hear.

OEDIPUS

I come to offer thee my woe-worn body as a gift,—not goodly to look upon; but the gains from it are better than beauty.

THESEUS

And what gain dost thou claim to have brought?

OEDIPUS

Hereafter thou shalt learn; not yet, I think.

THESEUS

At what time, then, will thy benefit be shown?

OEDIPUS

When I am dead, and thou hast given me burial.

THESEUS

Thou cravest life's last boon; for all between thou hast no memory,—or no care.

OEDIPUS

Yea, for by that boon I reap all the rest.

THESEUS

Nay, then, this grace which thou cravest from me hath small compass.

OEDIPUS

Yet give heed; this issue is no light one,—no, verily.

THESEUS

Meanest thou, as between thy sons and me?

OEDIPUS

King, they would fain convey me to Thebes.

THESEUS

But if to thy content, then for thee exile is not seemly.

OEDIPUS

Nay, when *I* was willing, *they* refused.

THESEUS

But, foolish man, temper in misfortune is not meet.

OEDIPUS

When thou hast heard my story, chide; till then, forbear.

THESEUS

Say on: I must not pronounce without knowledge.

OEDIPUS

I have suffered, Theseus, cruel wrong on wrong.

THESEUS

Wilt thou speak of the ancient trouble of thy race?

OEDIPUS

No, verily: *that* is noised throughout Hellas.

THESEUS

What, then, is thy grief that passeth the griefs of man?

OEDIPUS

Thus it is with me. From my country I have been driven by mine own offspring; and my doom is to return no more, as guilty of a father's blood.

THESEUS

How, then, should they fetch thee to them, if ye must dwell apart?

OEDIPUS

The mouth of the god will constrain them.

THESEUS

In fear of what woe foreshown?

OEDIPUS

That they must be smitten in this land.

THESEUS

And how should bitterness come between them and me?

OEDIPUS

Kind son of Aegeus, to the gods alone comes never old age or death, but all else is confounded by all-mastering time. Earth's strength decays, and the strength of the body; faith dies, distrust is born; and the same spirit is never steadfast among friends, or betwixt city and city; for, be it soon or be it late, men find sweet turn to bitter, and then once more to love.

And if now all is sunshine between Thebes and thee, yet time, in his untold course, gives birth to days and nights untold, wherein for a small cause they shall sunder with the spear that plighted concord of to-day; when my slumbering and buried corpse, cold in death, shall one day drink their warm blood, if Zeus is still Zeus, and Phoebus, the son of Zeus, speaks true.

But, since I would not break silence touching mysteries, suffer me to cease where I began; only make thine own word good, and never shalt thou say that in vain didst thou welcome Oedipus to dwell in this realm, —unless the gods cheat my hope.

LEADER

King, from the first yon man hath shown the mind to perform these promises, or the like, for our land.

THESEUS

Who, then, would reject the friendship of such an one?—to whom, first, the hearth of an ally is ever open, by mutual right, among us; and then he hath come as a suppliant to our gods, fraught with no light recompense for this land and for me. In reverence for these claims, I will never spurn his grace, but will establish him as a citizen in the land. And if it is the stranger's pleasure to abide here, I will charge you to guard him; or if to come with me be more pleasing,—this choice, or that, Oedipus, thou canst take; thy will shall be mine.

OEDIPUS

O Zeus, mayest thou be good unto such men!

THESEUS

What wouldst thou, then? wouldst thou come to my house?

OEDIPUS

Yea, were it lawful;—but *this* is the place—

THESEUS

What art thou to do here? I will not thwart thee . . .

OEDIPUS

—where I shall vanquish those who cast me forth.

THESEUS

Great were this promised boon from thy presence.

OEDIPUS

It shall be—if thy pledge is kept with me indeed.

THESEUS

Fear not touching me; never will I fail thee.

OEDIPUS

I will not bind thee with an oath, as one untrue.

THESEUS

Well, thou wouldst win nought more than by my word.

OEDIPUS

How wilt thou act, then?

THESEUS

What may be thy fear?

OEDIPUS

Men will come—

THESEUS

Nay, these will look to that.

OEDIPUS

Beware lest, if thou leave me—

THESEUS

Teach me not my part.

OEDIPUS

Fear constrains—

THESEUS

My heart feels not fear.

OEDIPUS

Thou knowest not the threats—

THESEUS

I know that none shall take thee hence in my despite. Oft have threats blustered, in men's wrath, with threatenings loud and vain; but when the mind is lord of himself once more, the threats are gone. And for yon men, haply,—aye, though they have waxed bold to speak dread things of bringing thee back,—the sundering waters will prove wide, and hard to

sail. Now I would have thee be of a good courage, apart from any resolve of mine, if indeed Phoebus hath sent thee on thy way; still, though I be not here, my name, I wot, will shield thee from harm.

(THESEUS *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Stranger, in this land of goodly steeds thou hast come to earth's fairest home, even to our white Colonus; where the nightingale, a constant guest, trills her clear note in the covert of green glades, dwelling amid the wine-dark ivy and the god's inviolate bowers, rich in berries and fruit, unvisited by sun, unvexed by wind of any storm; where the reveller Dionysus ever walks the ground, companion of the nymphs that nursed him.

antistrophe 1

And, fed of heavenly dew, the narcissus blooms morn by morn with fair clusters, crown of the Great Goddesses from of yore; and the crocus blooms with golden beam. Nor fail the sleepless founts whence the waters of Cephisus wander, but each day with stainless tide he moveth over the plains of the land's swelling bosom, for the giving of quick increase; nor hath the Muses' quire abhorred this place, nor Aphrodite of the golden rein.

strophe 2

And a thing there is such as I know not by fame on Asian ground, or as ever born in the great Dorian isle of Pelops,—a growth unconquered, self-renewing, a terror to the spears of the foemen, a growth which mightily flourishes in this land,—the grey-leafed olive, nurturer of children. Youth shall not mar it by the ravage of his hand, nor any who dwells with old age; for the sleepless eye of the Morian [3] Zeus beholds it, and the grey-eyed Athena.

antistrophe 2

And another praise have I to tell for this the city our mother, the gift of a great god, a glory of the land most high; the might of horses, the might of young horses, the might of the sea.

For thou, son of Cronus, our lord Poseidon, hast throned her in this pride, since in these roads first thou didst show forth the curb that cures the rage of steeds. And the shapely oar, apt to men's hands, hath a wondrous speed on the brine, following the hundred-footed Nereids.

ANTIGONE

O land that art praised above all lands, now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds!

OEDIPUS

What new thing hath chanced, my daughter?

ANTIGONE

Yonder Creon draws near us,—not without followers, father.

OEDIPUS

Ah, kind elders, now give me, I pray you, the final proof of my safety!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Fear not—it shall be thine. If *I* am aged, this country's strength hath not grown old.

(CREON *enters with a train of attendants.*)

CREON

Sirs, noble dwellers in this land, I see that a sudden fear hath troubled your eyes at my coming; but shrink not from me, and let no ungentle word escape you.

I am here with no thought of force;—I am old, and I know that the city whereunto I have come is mighty, if any in Hellas hath might:—no,—I have been sent, in these my years, to plead with yonder man that he return with me to the land of Cadmus;—not one man's envoy am I, but with charge from our people all; since 'twas mine, by kinship, to mourn his woes as no Theban beside.

Nay, unhappy Oedipus, hear us, and come home! Rightfully art thou called by all the Cadmean folk, and in chief by me, even as I—unless I am the basest of all men born—chiefly sorrow for thine ills, old man, when I see thee, hapless one, a stranger and a wanderer evermore, roaming in beggary, with one handmaid for thy stay. Alas, I had not thought that she could fall to such a depth of misery as that whereunto she hath fallen —yon hapless girl!—while she ever tends thy dark life amid penury,— in ripe youth, but unwed,—a prize for the first rude hand.

Is it not a cruel reproach—alas!—that I have cast at thee, and me, and all our race? But indeed an open shame cannot be hid; then—in the name of thy fathers' gods, hearken to me, Oedipus!—hide it ***thou***, by consenting to return to the city and the house of thy fathers, after a kindly farewell to this State,—for she is worthy: yet thine own hath the first claim on thy piety, since 'twas she that nurtured thee of old.

OEDIPUS

All-daring, who from any plea of right wouldst draw a crafty device, why dost thou attempt me thus, and seek once more to take me in the toils where capture would be sorest? In the old days—when, distempered by my self-wrought woes, I yearned to be cast out of the land—thy will went not with mine to grant the boon. But when my fierce grief had spent its force, and the seclusion of the house was sweet, *then* wast thou for thrusting me from the house and from the land—nor had this kinship any dearness for thee then; and now, again—when thou seest that I have kindly welcome from this city and from all her sons, thou seekest to pluck me away, wrapping hard thoughts in soft words. And yet what joy is there here,—in kindness shown to us against our will? As if a man should give thee no gift, bring thee no aid, when thou wast fain of the boon; but after thy soul's desire was sated, should grant it then, when the grace could be gracious no more: wouldst thou not find that pleasure vain? Yet such are thine own offers unto me,—good in name, but in their substance evil.

And I will declare it to these also, that I may show thee false. Thou hast come to fetch me, not that thou mayest take me home, but that thou mayest plant me near thy borders, and so thy city may escape unscathed by troubles from this land. *That* portion is not for thee, but *this*,—my curse upon the country, ever abiding therein;—and for my sons, this heritage—room enough in my realm wherein—to die.

Am I not wiser than thou in the fortunes of Thebes? Yea, wiser far, as truer are the sources of my knowledge, even Phoebus, and his father, Zeus most high. But thou hast come hither with fraud on thy lips, yea, with a tongue keener than the edge of the sword; yet by thy pleading thou art like to reap more woe than weal. Howbeit, I know that I persuade thee not of this,—go!—and suffer us to live here; for even in this plight our life would not be evil, so were we content therewith.

CREON

Which, thinkest thou, most suffers in this parley,—I by thy course, or thou by thine own?

OEDIPUS

For me, 'tis enough if thy pleading fails, as with me, so with yon men who are nigh.

CREON

Unhappy man, shall it be seen that not even thy years have brought thee wit? Must thou live to be the reproach of age?

OEDIPUS

Thou hast a ready tongue, but I know not the honest man who hath fair words for every cause.

CREON

Words may be many, and yet may miss their aim.

OEDIPUS

As if thine, forsooth, were few, but aimed aright.

CREON

No, truly, for one whose wit is such as thine.

OEDIPUS

Depart—for I will say it in the name of yon men also!—and beset me not with jealous watch in the place where I am destined to abide.

CREON

These men—not thee—call I to witness: but, as for the strain of thine answer to thy kindred, if ever I take thee—

OEDIPUS

And who could take me in despite of these allies?

CREON

I promise thee, thou soon shalt smart without that.

OEDIPUS

Where is the deed which warrants that blustering word?

CREON

One of thy two daughters hath just been seized by me, and sent hence, —the other I will remove forthwith.

OEDIPUS

Woe is me!

CREON

More woeful thou wilt find it soon.

OEDIPUS

Thou hast my child?

CREON

And will have this one ere long.

OEDIPUS

Alas! friends, what will ye do? Will ye forsake me? will ye not drive the godless man from this land?

LEADER

Hence, stranger, hence—begone! Unrighteous is thy present deed—unrighteous the deed which thou hast done.

CREON (*to his attendants*)

'Twere time for you to lead off yon girl perforce, if she will not go of her free will.

ANTIGONE

Wretched that I am! whither shall I fly?—where find help from gods or men?

LEADER (*threateningly, to* CREON)

What wouldst thou, stranger?

CREON

I will not touch yon man, but her who is mine.

OEDIPUS

O, elders of the land!

LEADER

Stranger,—thy deed is not just.

CREON

'Tis just.

LEADER

How just?

CREON

I take mine own.

(*He lays his hand on* ANTIGONE.)

OEDIPUS

strophe

Hear, O Athens!

CHORUS

What wouldst thou, stranger? Release her! Thy strength, and ours, will soon be proved.

(*They approach him with threatening gestures.*)

CREON

Stand back!

CHORUS

Not from thee, while this is thy purpose.

CREON

Nay, 'twill be war with Thebes for thee, if thou harm me.

OEDIPUS

Said I not so?

CHORUS

Unhand the maid at once!

CREON

Command not where thou art not master.

CHORUS

Leave hold, I tell thee!

CREON

(*to one of his guards, who at a signal seizes* ANTIGONE)

And I tell thee—begone!

CHORUS

To the rescue, men of Colonus—to the rescue! Athens—yea, Athens—is outraged with the strong hand! Hither, hither to our help!

ANTIGONE

They drag me hence—ah me!—friends, friends!

OEDIPUS (*blindly seeking for her*)

Where art thou, my child?

ANTIGONE

I am taken by force—

OEDIPUS

Thy hands, my child!—

ANTIGONE

Nay, I am helpless.

CREON (*to his guards*)

Away with you!

OEDIPUS

Ah me, ah me!

(*The guards lead* ANTIGONE *off.*)

CREON

So *those* two crutches shall never more prop thy steps. But since 'tis thy will to worst thy country and thy friends—whose mandate, though a prince, I here discharge—then be that victory thine. For hereafter, I wot, thou wilt come to know all this,—that now, as in time past, thou hast done thyself no good, when, in despite of friends, thou hast indulged anger, which is ever thy bane.

(*He turns to follow his guards.*)

LEADER

Hold, stranger!

CREON

Hands off, I say!

LEADER

I will not let thee go, unless thou give back the maidens.

CREON

Then wilt thou soon give Thebes a still dearer prize:—I will seize more than those two girls.

LEADER

What—whither wilt thou turn?

CREON

Yon man shall be my captive.

LEADER

A valiant threat!

CREON

'Twill forthwith be a deed.

LEADER

Aye, unless the ruler of this realm hinder thee.

OEDIPUS

Shameless voice! Wilt thou indeed touch me?

CREON

Be silent!

OEDIPUS

Nay, may the powers of this place suffer me to utter yet this curse! Wretch, who, when these eyes were dark, hast reft from me by force the helpless one who was mine eyesight! Therefore to thee and to thy race

may the Sun-god, the god who sees all things, yet grant an old age such as mine!

CREON

See ye this, people of the land?

OEDIPUS

They see both me and thee; they know that my wrongs are deeds, and my revenge—but breath.

CREON

I will not curb my wrath—nay, alone though I am, and slow with age, I'll take yon man by force.

(*He approaches* OEDIPUS *as if to seize him.*)

OEDIPUS

antistrophe

Woe is me!

CHORUS

'Tis a bold spirit that thou hast brought with thee, stranger, if thou thinkest to achieve this.

CREON

I do.

CHORUS

Then will I deem Athens a city no more.

CREON

In a just cause the weak vanquishes the strong.

OEDIPUS

Hear ye his words?

CHORUS

Yea, words which he shall not turn to deeds, Zeus knows!

CREON

Zeus haply knows—thou dost not.

CHORUS

Insolence!

CREON

Insolence which thou must bear.

CHORUS

What ho, people, rulers of the land, ho, hither with all speed, hither! These men are on their way to cross our borders!

(THESEUS *enters with his attendants in haste.*)

THESEUS

What means this shout? What is the trouble? What fear can have moved you to stay my sacrifice at the altar unto the sea-god, the lord of your Colonus? Speak, that I may know all, since therefore have I sped hither with more than easeful speed of foot.

OEDIPUS

Ah, friend,—I know thy voice,—yon man, but now, hath done me foul wrong.

THESEUS

What is that wrong? And who hath wrought it? Speak!

OEDIPUS

Creon, whom thou seest there, hath torn away from me my two children,—mine all.

THESEUS

What dost thou tell me?

OEDIPUS

Thou hast heard my wrong.

THESEUS (*to his attendants*)

Haste, one of you, to the altars yonder,—constrain the folk to leave the sacrifice, and to speed—footmen,—horsemen all, with slack rein,—to the region where the two highways meet, lest the maidens pass, and I become a mockery to this stranger, as one spoiled by force. Away, I tell thee—quick!—(*Some guards go out. Turning towards* CREON) As for yon man—if my wrath went as far as he deserves—I would not have suffered him to go scatheless from my hand. But now such law as he himself hath brought, and no other, shall be the rule for his correction.—(*Addressing* CREON) Thou shalt not quit this land until thou bring those maidens, and produce them in my sight; for thy deed is a disgrace to me, and to thine own race, and to thy country. Thou hast come unto a city that observes justice, and sanctions nothing without law,—yet thou hast put her lawful powers aside,—thou hast made this rude inroad,—thou art taking captives at thy pleasure, and snatching prizes by violence, as in the belief that my city was void of men, or manned by slaves, and I—a thing of nought.

Yet 'tis not by Theban training that thou art base; Thebes is not wont to rear unrighteous sons; nor would she praise thee, if she learned that thou art spoiling me,—yea, spoiling the gods, when by force thou leadest off their hapless suppliants. Now, were my foot upon thy soil, never would I wrest or plunder, without licence from the ruler of the land, whoso he might be—no, though my claim were of all claims most just: I should know how an alien ought to live among citizens. But thou art shaming a city that deserves it not, even thine own; and the fulness of thy years brings thee an old age bereft of wit.

I have said, then, and I say it once again—let the maidens be brought hither with all speed, unless thou wouldst sojourn in this land by no free choice;—and this I tell thee from my soul, as with my lips.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Seest thou thy plight, O stranger? Thou art deemed to come of a just race; but thy deeds are found evil.

CREON

Not counting this city void of manhood, son of Aegeus, nor of counsel, —as thou sayest,—have I wrought this deed; but because I judged that its folk could never be so enamoured of my kinsfolk as to foster them against my will. And I knew that this people would not receive a parricide,—a polluted man,—a man with whom had been found the unholy bride of her son. Such the wisdom, I knew, that dwells on the Mount of Ares in their land; which suffers not such wanderers to dwell within this realm. In that faith, I sought to take this prize. Nor had I done so, but that he was calling down bitter curses on me, and on my race; when, being so wronged, I deemed that I had warrant for this requital. For anger knows no old age, till death come; the dead alone feel no smart.

Therefore thou shalt act as seems to thee good; for, though my cause is just, the lack of aid makes me weak: yet, old though I am, I will endeavour to meet deed with deed.

OEDIPUS

O shameless soul, where, thinkest thou, falls this thy taunt,—on my age, or on thine own? Bloodshed—incest—misery—all this thy lips have launched against me,—all this that I have borne, woe is me! by no choice of mine: for such was the pleasure of the gods, wroth, haply, with the race from of old. Take me alone, and thou couldst find no sin to upbraid me withal, in quittance whereof I was driven to sin thus against myself and against my kin. Tell me, now,—if, by voice of oracle, some divine doom was coming on my sire, that he should die by a son's hand, how couldst thou justly reproach me therewith, who was then unborn,—whom no sire had yet begotten, no mother's womb conceived? And if, when born to woe

—as I was born—I met my sire in strife, and slew him, all ignorant what I was doing, and to whom,—how couldst thou justly blame the unknowing deed?

And my mother—wretch, hast thou no shame in forcing me to speak of her nuptials, when she was thy sister, and they such as I will now tell —for verily I will not be silent, when thou hast gone so far in impious speech. Yea, she was my mother,—oh, misery!—my mother,—I knew it not, nor she—and, for her shame, bare children to the son whom she had borne. But one thing, at least, I know,—that thy will consents thus to revile her and me; but not of my free will did I wed her, and not of free will do I speak now.

Nay, not in this marriage shall I be called guilty, nor in that slaying of my sire which thou ever urgest against me with bitter reviling. Answer me but one thing that I ask thee. If, here and now, one should come up and seek to slay thee—thee, the righteous—wouldst thou ask if the murderer was thy father, or wouldst thou reckon with him straightway? I think, as thou lovest thy life, thou wouldst requite the culprit, nor look around thee for thy warrant. But such the plight into which *I* came, led by gods; and in this, could my sire come back to life, methinks he would not gainsay me.

Yet *thou,*—for thou art not a just man, but one who holds all things meet to utter, knowing no barrier betwixt speech and silence—*thou* tauntest me in such wise, before yon men. And thou findest it timely to flatter the renowned Theseus, and Athens, saying how well her State hath been ordered: yet, while giving such large praise, thou forgettest this,—that if any land knows how to worship the gods with due rites, this land excels therein; whence thou hadst planned to steal me, the suppliant, the old man, and didst seek to seize me, and hast already carried off my daughters. Wherefore I now call on yon goddesses, I supplicate them, I adjure them with prayers, to bring me help and to fight in my cause, that thou mayest learn well by what manner of men this realm is guarded.

LEADER

The stranger is a good man, O king; his fate hath been accurst; but 'tis worthy of our succour.

THESEUS

Enough of words:—the doers of the deed are in flight, while we, the sufferers, stand still.

CREON

What, then, wouldst thou have a helpless man to do?

THESEUS

Show the way in their track,—while I escort thee,—that, if in these regions thou hast the maidens of our quest, thou thyself mayest discover them to me; but if thy men are fleeing with the spoil in their grasp, we may spare our trouble; the chase is for others, from whom they will never escape out of this land, to thank their gods.

Come,—forward! The spoiler hath been spoiled, I tell thee—Fate hath taken the hunter in the toils; gains got by wrongful arts are soon lost. And thou shalt have no ally in thine aim, for well wot I that not without accomplice or resource hast thou gone to such a length of violence in the daring mood which hath inspired thee here: no,—there was some one in whom thou wast trusting when thou didst essay these deeds. And to this I must look, nor make this city weaker than one man. Dost thou take my drift? Or seem these words as vain as seemed the warnings when thy deed was still a-planning?

CREON

Say what thou wilt while thou art here,—I will not cavil: but at home I, too, will know how to act.

THESEUS

For the present, threaten, but go forward.—Do thou, Oedipus, stay here in peace, I pray thee,—with my pledge that, unless I die before, I will not cease till I put thee in possession of thy children.

OEDIPUS

Heaven reward thee, Theseus, for thy nobleness, and thy loyal care in my behalf!

(THESEUS *and attendants, with* CREON, *go out on spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Oh, to be where the foeman, turned to bay, will soon join in the brazen clangour of battle, haply by the shores loved of Apollo, haply by that torch-lit strand where the Great Goddesses cherish dread rites for mortals, on whose lips the ministrant Eumolpidae have laid the precious seal of silence; where, methinks, the war-waking Theseus and the captives twain, the sister maids, will soon meet within our borders, amid a war-cry of men strong to save!

antistrophe 1

Or perchance they will soon draw nigh to the pastures on the west of Oea's snowy rock, borne on horses in their flight, or in chariots racing at speed.

Creon will be worsted! Terrible are the warriors of Colonus, and the followers of Theseus are terrible in their might. Yea, the steel of every bridle flashes,—with slack bridle-rein all the knighthood rides apace that worships our Queen of Chivalry, Athena, and the earth-girdling Sea-god, the son of Rhea's love.

strophe 2

Is the battle now, or yet to be? For somehow my soul woos me to the hope that soon I shall be face to face with the maidens thus sorely tried, thus sorely visited by the hand of a kinsman.

To-day, to-day, Zeus will work some great thing: I have presage of victory in the strife. O to be a dove with swift strength as of the storm, that I might reach an airy cloud, with gaze lifted above the fray!

antistrophe 2

Hear, all-ruling lord of heaven, all-seeing Zeus! Enable the guardians of this land, in might triumphant, to achieve the capture that gives the prize to their hands! So grant thy daughter also, our dread Lady, Pallas Athena! And Apollo, the hunter, and his sister, who follows the dappled, swift-footed deer—fain am I that they should come, a twofold strength, to this land and to her people.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, wanderer friend, thou wilt not have to tax thy watcher with false augury,—for yonder I see the maidens drawing near with an escort.

OEDIPUS

Where—where? How? What sayest thou?

(ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE *enter, with* THESEUS *and his attendants, on the spectators' left.*)

ANTIGONE

O father, father, that some god would suffer thine eyes to see this noble man, who hath brought us here to thee!

OEDIPUS

My child!—ye are here indeed?

ANTIGONE

Yea, for these strong arms have saved us—Theseus, and his trusty followers.

OEDIPUS

Come ye hither, my child,—let me embrace you—restored beyond all hope!

ANTIGONE

Thy wish shall be granted—we crave what we bestow.

OEDIPUS

Where, then, where are ye?

ANTIGONE

Here approaching thee together.

OEDIPUS

My darlings!

ANTIGONE

A father loves his own.

OEDIPUS

Props of mine age!

ANTIGONE

And sharers of thy sorrow.

OEDIPUS

I hold my dear ones; and now, should I die, I were not wholly wretched, since ye have come to me. Press close to me on either side, children, cleave to your sire, and repose from this late roaming, so forlorn, so grievous! And tell me what hath passed as shortly as ye may; brief speech sufficeth for young maidens.

ANTIGONE

Here is our deliverer: from him thou shouldst hear the story, father, since his is the deed; so shall my part be brief.

OEDIPUS

Sir, marvel not, if with such yearning I prolong my words unto my children, found again beyond my hope. For well I wot that this joy in respect of them hath come to me from thee, and thee alone: thou hast rescued them, and no man beside. And may the gods deal with thee after my wish,—with thee, and with this land; for among you, above all human kind, have I found the fear of heaven, and the spirit of fairness, and the lips that lie not. I know these things, which with these words I requite; for what I have, I have through thee, and no man else.

Stretch forth thy right hand, O king, I pray thee, that I may touch it,

and, if 'tis lawful, kiss thy cheek.—But what am I saying? Unhappy as I have become, how could I wish thee to touch one with whom all stain of sin hath made its dwelling? No, not I,—nor allow thee, if thou wouldst. They alone can share this burden, to whom it hath come home.—Receive my greeting where thou standest; and in the future still give me thy loyal care, as thou hast given it to this hour.

THESEUS

No marvel is it to me, if thou hast shown some mind to large discourse, for joy in these thy children, and if thy first care hath been for their words, rather than for me; indeed, there is nought to vex me in that. Not in words so much as deeds would I make the lustre of my life. Thou hast the proof; I have failed in nothing of my sworn faith to thee, old man; here am I, with the maidens living,—yea, scatheless of those threats. And how the fight was won, what need that I should idly boast, when thou wilt learn it from these maidens in converse?

But there is a matter that hath newly chanced to me, as I came hither; lend me thy counsel thereon, for, small though it be, 'tis food for wonder; and mortal man should deem nothing beneath his care.

OEDIPUS

What is it, son of Aegeus? Tell me;—I myself know nought of that whereof thou askest.

THESEUS

A man, they say,—not thy countryman, yet thy kinsman,—hath somehow cast himself, a suppliant, at our altar of Poseidon, where I was sacrificing when I first set out hither.

OEDIPUS

Of what land is he? What craves he by the supplication?

THESEUS

I know one thing only; they say, he asks brief speech with thee, which shall not irk thee much.

OEDIPUS

On what theme? That suppliant posture is not trivial.

THESEUS

He asks, they say, no more than that he may confer with thee, and return unharmed from his journey hither.

OEDIPUS

Who can he be who thus implores the god?

THESEUS

Look if ye have any kinsman at Argos, who might crave this boon of thee.

OEDIPUS

O friend! Say no word more!

THESEUS

What ails thee?

OEDIPUS

Ask it not of me—

THESEUS

Ask what?—Speak!

OEDIPUS

By those words I know who is the suppliant.

THESEUS

And who can he be, against whom I should have a grief?

OEDIPUS

My son, O king,—the hated son whose words would vex mine ear as the words of no man beside.

THESEUS

What? Canst thou not listen, without doing what thou wouldst not? Why should it pain thee to hear him?

OEDIPUS

Most hateful, king, hath that voice become to his sire:—lay me not under constraint to yield in this.

THESEUS

But think whether his suppliant state constrains thee: what if thou hast a duty of respect for the god?

ANTIGONE

Father, hearken to me, though I be young who counsel. Allow the king to gratify his own heart, and to gratify the god as he wishes; and, for thy daughter's sake, allow our brother to come. For he will not pluck thee perforce from thy resolve,—never fear,—by such words as shall not be spoken for thy good. But to hear him speak,—what harm can be in that? Ill-devised deeds, thou knowest, are bewrayed by speech. Thou art his sire; so that, e'en if he were to wrong thee with the most impious of foul wrongs, my father, it is not lawful for thee to wrong him again.

Oh, let him come: other men, also, have evil offspring, and are swift to wrath; but they hear advice, and are charmed from their mood by the gentle spells of friends.

Look thou to the past, not to the present,—think on all that thou hast borne through sire and mother; and if thou considerest those things, well I wot, thou wilt discern how evil is the end that waits on evil wrath; not slight are thy reasons to think thereon, bereft, as thou art, of the sight that returns no more.

Nay, yield to us! It is not seemly for just suitors to sue long; it is not seemly that a man should receive good, and thereafter lack the mind to requite it.

OEDIPUS

My child, 'tis sore for me, this pleasure that ye win from me by your pleading;—but be it as ye will. Only, if that man is to come hither,—friend, let no one ever become master of my life!

THESEUS

I need not to hear such words more than once, old man:—I would not boast; but be sure that thy life is safe, while any god saves mine.

(THESEUS *goes out, to the right of the spectators.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Whoso craves the ampler length of life, not content to desire a modest span, him will I judge with no uncertain voice; he cleaves to folly.

For the long days lay up full many things nearer unto grief than joy; but as for thy delights, their place shall know them no more, when a man's life hath lapsed beyond the fitting term; and the Deliverer comes at the last to all alike,—when the doom of Hades is suddenly revealed, without marriage-song, or lyre, or dance,—even Death at the last.

antistrophe

Not to be born is, past all prizing, best; but, when a man hath seen the light, this is next best by far, that with all speed he should go thither, whence he hath come.

For when he hath seen youth go by, with its light follies, what troublous affliction is strange to his lot, what suffering is not therein? —envy, factions, strife, battles and slaughters; and, last of all, age claims him for her own,—age, dispraised, infirm, unsociable, unfriended, with whom all woe of woe abides.

epode

In such years is yon hapless one, not I alone: and as some cape that fronts the North is lashed on every side by the waves of winter, so he also is fiercely lashed evermore by the dread troubles that break on him like billows, some from the setting of the sun, some from the rising, some in the region of the noon-tide beam, some from the gloom-wrapped hills of the North.

ANTIGONE

Lo, yonder, methinks, I see the stranger coming hither,—yea, without attendants, my father,—the tears streaming from his eyes.

OEDIPUS

Who is he?

ANTIGONE

The same who was in our thoughts from the first;—Polyneices hath come to us.

(POLYNEICES *enters, on the spectators' left.*)

POLYNEICES

Ah me, what shall I do? Whether shall I weep first for mine own sorrows, sisters, or for mine aged sire's, as I see them yonder? Whom I have found in a strange land, an exile here with you twain, clad in such raiment, whereof the foul squalor hath dwelt with that aged form so long, a very blight upon his flesh,—while above the sightless eyes the unkempt hair flutters in the breeze; and matching with these things, meseems, is the food that he carries, hapless one, against hunger's pinch.

Wretch that I am! I learn all this too late: and I bear witness that I am proved the vilest of men in all that touches care for thee:—from mine own lips hear what I am. But, seeing that Zeus himself, in all that he doeth, hath Mercy for the sharer of his throne, may she come to thy side also, my father; for the faults can be healed, but can never more be made worse.

(*A pause*)

Why art thou silent? . . . Speak, father:—turn not away from me. Hast thou not even an answer for me? Wilt thou dismiss me in mute scorn, without telling wherefore thou art wroth?

O ye, his daughters, sisters mine, strive ye, at least, to move our sire's implacable, inexorable silence, that he send me not away dishonoured,—who am the suppliant of the god,—in such wise as this, with no word of response.

ANTIGONE

Tell him thyself, unhappy one, what thou hast come to seek. As words flow, perchance they touch to joy, perchance they glow with anger, or with tenderness, and so they somehow give a voice to the dumb.

POLYNEICES

Then will I speak boldly,—for thou dost admonish me well,—first claiming the help of the god himself, from whose altar the king of this land raised me, that I might come hither, with warranty to speak and hear, and go my way unharmed. And I will crave, strangers, that these pledges be kept with me by you, and by my sisters here, and by my sire.—But now I would fain tell thee, father, why I came.

I have been driven, an exile, from my fatherland, because, as eldest-born, I claimed to sit in thy sovereign seat. Wherefore Eteocles, though the younger, thrust me from the land, when he had neither worsted me in argument, nor come to trial of might and deed,—no, but won the city over. And of this I deem it most likely that the curse on thy house is the cause; then from soothsayers also I so hear. For when I came to Dorian Argos, I took the daughter of Adrastus to wife; and I bound to me by oath all of the Apian land who are foremost in renown of war, that with them I might levy the sevenfold host of spearmen against Thebes, and die in my just cause, or cast the doers of this wrong from the realm.

Well, and wherefore have I come hither now? With suppliant prayers, my father, unto thee—mine own, and the prayers of mine allies, who now, with seven hosts behind their seven spears, have set their leaguer round the plain of Thebes; of whom is swift-speared Amphiaraus, matchless warrior, matchless augur; then the son of Oeneus, Aetolian Tydeus; Eteoclus third, of Argive birth; the fourth, Hippomedon, sent by Talaos, his sire; while Capaneus, the fifth, vaunts that he will burn Thebes with fire, unto the ground; and sixth, Arcadian Parthenopaeus rushes to the war, named from that virgin of other days whose marriage in after-time gave him birth, trusty son of Atalanta. Last, I, thy son,—or if not thine, but offspring of an evil fate, yet thine at least in name,—lead the fearless host of Argos unto Thebes.

And we, by these thy children and by thy life, my father, implore thee all, praying thee to remit thy stern wrath against me, as I go forth to chastise my brother, who hath thrust me out and robbed me of my fatherland. For if aught of truth is told by oracles, they said that victory should be with those whom thou shouldst join.

Then, by our fountains and by the gods of our race, I ask thee to hearken and to yield; a beggar and an exile am I, an exile thou; by court to others we have a home, both thou and I, sharers of one doom; while *he*, king in the house—woe is me!—mocks in his pride at thee and me alike.

But, if thou assist my purpose, small toil or time, and I will scatter his strength to the winds: and so will I bring thee and stablish thee in thine own house, and stablish myself, when I have cast him out by force. Be thy will with me, and that boast may be mine: without thee, I cannot e'en return alive.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

For his sake who hath sent him, Oedipus, speak, as seems thee good, ere thou send the man away.

OEDIPUS

Nay, then, my friends, guardians of this land, were not Theseus he who had sent him hither to me, desiring that he should have my response, never should he have heard this voice. But now he shall be graced with it, ere he go,—yea, and hear from me such words as shall never gladden his life: —villain, who when thou hadst the sceptre and the throne, which now thy brother hath in Thebes, dravest me, thine own father, into exile, and madest me citiless, and madest me to wear this garb which now thou weepest to behold, when thou hast come unto the same stress of misery as I. The time for tears is past: no, *I* must bear this burden while I live, ever thinking of thee as of a murderer; for 'tis thou that hast brought my days to this anguish, 'tis thou that hast thrust me out; to thee I owe it that I wander, begging my daily bread from strangers. And, had these daughters not been born to be my comfort, verily I had been dead, for aught of help from thee. Now, these girls preserve me, these my nurses, these who are men, not women, in true service: but ye are aliens, and no sons of mine.

Therefore the eyes of Fate look upon thee—not yet as they will look anon, if indeed those hosts are moving against Thebes. Never canst thou overthrow that city; no, first shalt thou fall stained with bloodshed, and thy brother likewise. Such the curses that my soul sent forth before against you twain, and such do I now invoke to fight for me, that ye may deem it meet to revere parents, nor scorn your father utterly, because he is sightless who begat such sons; for these maidens did not thus. So my curses have control of thy 'supplication' and thy 'throne,'—if indeed Justice, revealed from of old, sits with Zeus in the might of the eternal laws.

And thou—begone, abhorred of me, and unfathered!—begone, thou vilest of the vile, and with thee take these my curses which I call down on thee—never to vanquish the land of thy race, no, nor ever return to hill-girt Argos, but by a kindred hand to die, and slay him by whom thou hast been driven out. Such is my prayer; and I call the paternal darkness of dread Tartarus to take thee unto another home,—I call the spirits of

this place,—I call the Destroying God, who hath set that dreadful hatred in you twain. Go, with these words in thine ears—go, and publish it to the Cadmeans all, yea, and to thine own staunch allies, that Oedipus hath divided such honours to his sons.

LEADER

Polyneices, in thy past goings I take no joy; and now go thy way with speed.

POLYNEICES

Alas, for my journey and my baffled hope: alas, for my comrades! What an end was that march to have, whereon we sallied forth from Argos: woe is me!—aye, such an end, that I may not even utter it to any of my companions, or turn them back, but must go in silence to meet this doom.

Ah ye, his daughters and my sisters,—since ye hear these hard prayers of your sire,—if this father's curses be fulfilled, and some way of return to Thebes be found for you, oh, as ye fear the gods, do not, for your part, dishonour me,—nay, give me burial, and due funeral rites. And so the praise which ye now win from yonder man, for your service, shall be increased by another praise not less, by reason of the office wrought for me.

ANTIGONE

Polyneices, I entreat thee, hear me in one thing!

POLYNEICES

What is it, dearest Antigone? Speak!

ANTIGONE

Turn thy host back to Argos,—aye, with all speed,—and destroy not thyself and Thebes.

POLYNEICES

Nay, it cannot be: for how again could I lead the same host, when once I had blenched?

ANTIGONE

But why, my brother, should thine anger rise again? What gain is promised thee in destroying thy native city?

POLYNEICES

'Tis shame to be an exile, and, eldest born as I am, to be thus mocked on my brother's part.

ANTIGONE

Seest thou, then, to what sure fulfilment thou art bringing his prophecies, who bodes mutual slaying for you twain?

POLYNEICES

Aye, for he wishes it:—but I must not yield.

ANTIGONE

Ah me unhappy!—But who will dare to follow thee, hearing what prophecies yon man hath uttered?

POLYNEICES

I will not e'en report ill tidings: 'tis a good leader's part to tell the better news, and not the worse.

ANTIGONE

Brother! Thy resolve, then, is thus fixed?

POLYNEICES

Yea,—and detain me not. For mine it now shall be to tread yon path, with evil doom and omen from this my sire and from his Furies; but for you twain, may Zeus make your path bright, if ye do my wishes when I am dead,—since in my life ye can do them no more.—(*He gently disengages himself from their embrace.*) Now, release me,—and farewell; for nevermore shall ye behold me living.

ANTIGONE

Woe is me!

POLYNEICES

Mourn not for me.

ANTIGONE

And who would not bewail thee, brother, who thus art hurrying to death foreseen?

POLYNEICES

If 'tis fate, I must die.

ANTIGONE

Nay, nay,—hear my pleading!

POLYNEICES

Plead not amiss.

ANTIGONE

Then woe is me, indeed, if I must lose thee!

POLYNEICES

Nay, that rests with Fortune,—that end or another.—For you twain, at least, I pray the gods that ye never meet with ill; for in all men's eyes ye are unworthy to suffer.

(*He goes out on the spectators' left.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

Behold, new ills have newly come, in our hearing, from the sightless stranger,—ills fraught with a heavy doom; unless, perchance, Fate is finding its goal. For 'tis not mine to say that a decree of Heaven is ever vain: watchful, aye watchful of those decrees is Time, overthrowing some fortunes, and on the morrow lifting others, again, to honour.—Hark that sound in the sky!—Zeus defend us!

(*Thunder is heard.*)

OEDIPUS

My children, my children! If there be any man to send, would that some one would fetch hither the peerless Theseus!

ANTIGONE

And what, father, is the aim of thy summons?

OEDIPUS

This winged thunder of Zeus will lead me anon to Hades: nay, send, and tarry not.

(*A second peal is heard.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

antistrophe 1

Hark! With louder noise it crashes down, unutterable, hurled by Zeus! The hair of my head stands up for fear, my soul is sore dismayed; for again the lightning flashes in the sky. Oh, to what event will it give birth? I am afraid, for never in vain doth it rush forth, or without grave issue. O thou dread sky! O Zeus!

OEDIPUS

Daughters, his destined end hath come upon your sire; he can turn his face from it no more.

ANTIGONE

How knowest thou? What sign hath told thee this?

OEDIPUS

I know it well.—But let some one go, I pray you, with all speed, and bring hither the lord of this realm.

(*Another peal is heard.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 2

Ha! Listen! Once again that piercing thunder-voice is around us! Be merciful, O thou god, be merciful, if thou art bringing aught of gloom for the land our mother! Gracious may I find thee, nor, because I have looked on a man accurst, have some meed, not of blessing for my portion! O Zeus our lord, to thee I cry!

OEDIPUS

Is the man near? Will he find me still alive, children, and master of my mind?

ANTIGONE

And what is the pledge which thou wouldst have fixed in thy mind?

OEDIPUS

In return for his benefits, I would duly give him the requital promised when I received them.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

antistrophe 2

What ho, my son, hither, come hither! Or if in the glade's inmost recess, for the honour of the sea-god Poseidon, thou art hallowing his altar with sacrifice,—come thence! Worthy art thou in the stranger's sight, worthy are thy city and thy folk, that he should render a just recompense for benefits. Haste, come quickly, O king!

(THESEUS *enters, on the spectators' right.*)

THESEUS

Wherefore once more rings forth a summons from you all,—from my people as clearly as from our guest? Can a thunderbolt from Zeus be the cause, or rushing hail in its fierce onset? All forebodings may find place, when the god sends such a storm.

OEDIPUS

King, welcome is thy presence; and 'tis some god that hath made for thee the good fortune of this coming.

THESEUS

And what new thing hath now befallen, son of Laius?

OEDIPUS

My life hangs in the scale: and I fain would die guiltless of bad faith to thee and to this city, in respect of my pledges.

THESEUS

And what sign of thy fate holds thee in suspense?

OEDIPUS

The gods, their own heralds, bring me the tidings, with no failure in the signs appointed of old.

THESEUS

What sayest thou are the signs of these things, old man?

OEDIPUS

The thunder, peal on peal,—the lightning, flash on flash, hurled from the unconquered hand.

THESEUS

Thou winnest my belief, for in much I find thee a prophet whose voice is not false;—then speak what must be done.

OEDIPUS

Son of Aegeus, I will unfold that which shall be a treasure for this thy city, such as age can never mar. Anon, unaided, and with no hand to guide me, I will show the way to the place where I must die. But that place reveal thou never unto mortal man,—tell not where it is hidden, nor in what region it lies; that so it may ever make for thee a defence, better than many shields, better than the succouring spear of neighbours.

But, for mysteries which speech may not profane, thou shalt mark them for thyself, when thou comest to that place alone: since neither to any of this people can I utter them, nor to mine own children, dear though they are. No, guard them thou alone; and when thou art coming to the end of life, disclose them to thy heir alone; let him teach his heir; and so thenceforth.

And thus shalt thou hold this city unscathed from the side of the Dragon's brood;—full many States lightly enter on offence, e'en though their neighbour lives aright. For the gods are slow, though they are sure, in visitation, when men scorn godliness, and turn to frenzy. Not such be thy fate, son of Aegeus.—Nay, thou knowest such things, without my precepts.

But to that place—for the divine summons urges me—let us now set forth, and hesitate no more.—(*As if suddenly inspired, he moves with slow but firm steps towards the left of the scene, beckoning the others*

onward.) My children, follow me,—thus,—for I now have in strange wise been made your guide, as ye were your sire's. On,—touch me not,—nay, suffer me unaided to find out that sacred tomb where 'tis my portion to be buried in this land.

This way,—hither,—this way!—for this way doth Guiding Hermes lead me, and the goddess of the dead!

O light,—no light to me,—mine once thou wast, I ween,—but now my body feels thee for the last time! For now go I to hide the close of my life with Hades.—Truest of friends! blessed be thou, and this land, and thy lieges; and, when your days are blest, think on me the dead, for your welfare evermore.

(*He passes from the stage on the spectators' left, followed by his daughters,* THESEUS, *and attendants.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

If with prayer I may adore the Unseen Goddess, and thee, lord of the children of night, O hear me, Aidoneus, Aidoneus! Not in pain, not by a doom that wakes sore lament, may the stranger pass to the fields of the dead below, the all-enshrouding, and to the Stygian house. Many were the sorrows that came to him without cause; but in requital a just god will lift him up.

antistrophe

Goddesses Infernal! And thou, dread form of the unconquered hound, thou who hast thy lair in those gates of many guests, thou untameable Watcher of Hell, gnarling from the cavern's jaws, as rumour from the beginning tells of thee!

Hear me, O Death, son of Earth and Tartarus! May that Watcher leave a clear path for the stranger on his way to the nether fields of the dead! To thee I call, giver of the eternal sleep.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters from the left.*)

MESSENGER

Countrymen, my tidings might most shortly be summed thus: Oedipus is gone. But the story of the hap may not be told in brief words, as the deeds yonder were not briefly done.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

He is gone, hapless one?

MESSENGER

Be sure that he hath passed from life.

LEADER

Ah, how? by a god-sent doom, and painless?

MESSENGER

There thou touchest on what is indeed worthy of wonder. How he moved hence, thou thyself must know, since thou wast here,—with no friend to show the way, but guide himself unto us all.

Now, when he had come to the sheer Threshold, bound by brazen steps to earth's deep roots, he paused in one of many branching paths, near the basin in the rock, where the inviolate covenant of Theseus and Peirithous hath its memorial. He stood midway between that basin and the Thorician stone,—the hollow pear-tree and the marble tomb; then sate him down, and loosed his sordid raiment.

And then he called his daughters, and bade them fetch water from some fount, that he should wash, and make a drink-offering. And they went to the hill which was in view, Demeter's hill who guards the tender plants, and in short space brought that which their father had enjoined; then they ministered to him with washing, and dressed him, as use ordains.

But when he had content of doing all, and no part of his desire was now unheeded, then was thunder from the Zeus of the Shades: and the maidens shuddered as they heard; they fell at their father's knees, and wept, nor ceased from beating the breast, and wailing very sore.

And when he heard their sudden bitter cry, he put his arms around them, and said: 'My children, this day ends your father's life. For now all hath perished that was mine, and no more shall ye bear the burden of tending me,—no light one, well I know, my children; yet one little word makes all those toils as nought; *love* had ye from me, as from none beside; and now ye shall have me with you no more, through all your days to come.'

On such wise, close-clinging to each other, sire and daughters sobbed and wept. But when they had made an end of wailing, and the sound went up no more, there was a stillness; and suddenly a voice of one who cried aloud to him, so that the hair of all stood up on their heads for sudden fear, and they were afraid. For the god called him with many callings and manifold: *'Oedipus, Oedipus, why delay we to go? Thou tarriest too long.'*

But when he perceived that he was called of the god, he craved that the king Theseus should draw near; and when he came near, said: 'O my friend, give, I pray thee, the solemn pledge of thy right hand to my children, and ye, daughters, to him; and promise thou never to forsake them of thy free will, but to do all things for their good, as thy friendship and the time may prompt.' And he, like a man of noble spirit, without making lament, sware to keep that promise to his friend.

But when Theseus had so promised, straightway Oedipus felt for his children with blind hands, and said: 'O my children, ye must be nobly brave of heart, and depart from this place, nor ask to behold unlawful sights, or to hear such speech as may not be heard. Nay, go with all haste; only let Theseus be present, as is his right, a witness of those things which are to be.'

So spake he, and we all heard; and with streaming tears and with lamentation we followed the maidens away. But when we had gone apart, after no long time we looked back, and Oedipus we saw nowhere any more, but the king alone, holding his hand before his face to screen his eyes, as if some dread sight had been seen, and such as none might endure to behold. And then, after a short space, we saw him salute the earth and the home of the gods above, both at once, in one prayer.

But by what doom Oedipus perished, no man can tell, save Theseus alone. No fiery thunderbolt of the god removed him in that hour, nor any rising of storm from the sea; but either a messenger from the gods, or the world of the dead, the nether adamant, riven for him in love, without pain; for the passing of the man was not with lamentation, or in sickness and suffering, but, above mortal's, wonderful. And if to any I seem to speak folly, I would not woo their belief, who count me foolish.

LEADER

And where are the maidens, and their escort?

MESSENGER

Not far hence; for the sounds of mourning tell plainly that they approach.

(ANTIGONE *and* ISMENE *enter, chanting their song of lamentation.*)

ANTIGONE

strophe 1

Woe, woe! Now, indeed, is it for us, unhappy sisters, in all fulness to bewail the curse on the blood that is ours from our sire! For him, while he lived, we bore that long pain without pause; and at the last a sight and a loss that baffle thought are ours to tell.

CHORUS

And how is it with you?

ANTIGONE

We can but conjecture, friends.

CHORUS

He is gone?

ANTIGONE

Even as thou mightest wish: yea, surely, when death met him not in war, or on the deep, but he was snatched to the viewless fields by some swift, strange doom. Ah me! and a night as of death hath come on the eyes of us twain: for how shall we find our bitter livelihood, roaming to some far land, or on the waves of the sea?

ISMENE

I know not. Oh that deadly Hades would join me in death unto mine aged sire! Woe is me! I cannot live the life that must be mine.

CHORUS

Best of daughters, sisters twain, Heaven's doom must be borne: be no more fired with too much grief: ye have so fared that ye should not repine.

ANTIGONE

antistrophe 1

Ah, so care past can seem lost joy! For that which was no way sweet had sweetness, while therewith I held *him* in mine embrace. Ah, father, dear one, ah thou who hast put on the darkness of the under-world for ever, not even there shalt thou ever lack our love,—her love and mine.

CHORUS

He hath fared—

ANTIGONE

He hath fared as he would.

CHORUS

In what wise?

ANTIGONE

On foreign ground, the ground of his choice, he hath died; in the shadow of the grave he hath his bed for ever; and he hath left mourning behind him, not barren of tears. For with these streaming eyes, father, I bewail thee; nor know I, ah me, how to quell my sorrow for thee, my sorrow that is so great.—Ah me! 'twas thy wish to die in a strange land; but now thou hast died without gifts at my hand.

ISMENE

Woe is me! What new fate, think'st thou, awaits thee and me, my sister, thus orphaned of our sire?

CHORUS

Nay, since he hath found a blessed end, my children, cease from this lament; no mortal is hard for evil fortune to capture.

ANTIGONE

strophe 2

Sister, let us hasten back.

ISMENE

Unto what deed?

ANTIGONE

A longing fills my soul.

ISMENE

Whereof?

ANTIGONE

To see the dark home—

ISMENE

Of whom?

ANTIGONE

Ah me! of our sire.

ISMENE

And how can this thing be lawful? Hast thou no understanding?

ANTIGONE

Why this reproof?

ISMENE

And knowest thou not this also—

ANTIGONE

What wouldst thou tell me more?—

ISMENE

That he was perishing without tomb, apart from all?

ANTIGONE

Lead me thither, and then slay me also.

ISMENE

Ah me unhappy! Friendless and helpless, where am I now to live my hapless life?

CHORUS

antistrophe 2

My children, fear not.

ANTIGONE

But whither am I to flee?

CHORUS

Already a refuge hath been found—

ANTIGONE

How meanest thou?—

CHORUS

—for your fortunes, that no harm should touch them.

ANTIGONE

I know it well.

CHORUS

What, then, is thy thought?

ANTIGONE

How we are to go home, I cannot tell.

CHORUS

And do not seek to go.

ANTIGONE

Trouble besets us.

CHORUS

And erstwhile bore hardly on you.

ANTIGONE

Desperate then, and now more cruel than despair.

CHORUS

Great, verily, is the sea of your troubles.

ANTIGONE

Alas, alas! O Zeus, whither shall we turn? To what last hope doth fate now urge us?

(THESEUS *enters.*)

THESEUS

systema

Weep no more, maidens; for where the kindness of the Dark Powers is an abiding grace to the quick and to the dead, there is no room for mourning; divine anger would follow.

ANTIGONE

Son of Aegeus, we supplicate thee!

THESEUS

For the obtaining of what desire, my children?

ANTIGONE

We fain would look with our own eyes upon our father's tomb.

THESEUS

Nay, it is not lawful.

ANTIGONE

How sayest thou, king, lord of Athens?

THESEUS

My children, he gave me charge that no one should draw nigh unto that place, or greet with voice the sacred tomb wherein he sleeps. And he said that, while I duly kept that word, I should always hold the land unharmed. These pledges, therefore, were heard from my lips by the god, and by the all-seeing Watcher of oaths, the servant of Zeus.

ANTIGONE

Nay, then, if this is pleasing to the dead, with this we must content us. But send us to Thebes the ancient, if haply we may hinder the bloodshed that is threatened to our brothers.

THESEUS

So will I do; and if in aught beside I can profit you, and pleasure the dead who hath lately gone from us, I am bound to spare no pains.

CHORUS

Come, cease lamentation, lift it up no more; for verily these things stand fast.

NOTES FOR OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

1. Sophocles probably had Herodotus, II, 35 in mind when he wrote these lines.

2. Sophocles here has departed from the common account which made Eteocles the elder.

3. This epithet is applied to Zeus because he was conceived to be the protector of *moriai,* the sacred olives.

THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES

I
ALCESTIS

Characters in the Play

Apollo
Death
Chorus of Old Men
A Woman Servant
Alcestis, *the Queen, wife of* Admetus
Admetus, *King of Thessaly*
Eumelus, *their child*
Heracles
Pheres, *father of* Admetus
A Man Servant

INTRODUCTION

THE ALCESTIS is the earliest of the plays of Euripides which we now possess. Presented in 438 B.C., it constituted the fourth play in a tetralogy which the poet had entered in competition for the tragic award of that year. Contrary to the usual practice which demanded that the fourth member of the tetralogy be a Satyr-play, Euripides has placed the *Alcestis* in this position, for which by its very character as a "tragi-comedy" it is peculiarly suited. Although on the whole the play is tragic in tone, it is rendered somewhat lighter, first by the part which the slightly drunken Heracles plays in the action, and finally by the happy resolution of the plot.

Possibly a folk-tale of wide currency was the original source for the legend upon which Euridipes drew in writing his play. The version which he knew, and which had been interpreted by an earlier tragic poet, Phrynichus, contained the story of Admetus, king of Thessaly. Apollo, so the legend runs, had incurred the displeasure of his father Zeus, had been banished from Olympus, and condemned to serve under a mortal master for a stated period of time. He came to Thessaly and dwelt with Admetus, an exemplary king. As Apollo's term of service was drawing to a close, it became known that Admetus was doomed to an early death. Apollo, desiring to reward him for his kindness and apparent excellence of character, prevailed upon the Fates to spare him from his premature death. The Fates agreed, on condition that Admetus could procure a substitute who would be willing to die in his place. Admetus approached his father, mother, friends and kin, in his effort to find such a substitute, but all refused his request. Finally it was Alcestis, his devoted wife, who undertook the service. The play opens on the day when she is to die.

Euripides in the *Alcestis* has taken a human problem and stated it in such striking terms of character and situation that its point cannot be missed. Pheres in his way illuminates the question at issue by his uncompromising condemnation of his son, Admetus. Alcestis has a more important function since her character throws that of her husband into higher relief. She herself meets her end with fortitude, breaking just enough at the very last moment so that her portrayal becomes convincing. She manages, however, to be calm and matter-of-fact, in striking con-

trast to Admetus when in his egotism and sentimentality he begins to lose control of himself. As the play advances a sharper and sharper light is thrown upon him. In the last analysis, the actual means by which Alcestis is restored and the part which Heracles plays here, which in turn cannot be divorced from his conventional rôle as a brawling character in straight comedy, are irrelevant so far as the central significance of the play is concerned. This significance lies in the study of self-sacrifice and its implications. There is nothing but praise for Alcestis' act, yet the further problem is raised: what happens to the individual who accepts the benefits of a sacrifice made by another? Admetus at the end of the play has had the veil torn from his eyes, and he realizes at last the extent of his own vileness. With a sure hand Euripides has communicated his meaning.

ALCESTIS

(SCENE:—*At Pherae, outside the Palace of* ADMETUS, *King of Thessaly. The centre of the scene represents a portico with columns and a large double-door. To the left are the women's quarters, to the right the guest rooms. The centre doors of the Palace slowly open inwards, and Apollo comes out. In his left hand he carries a large unstrung golden bow. He moves slowly and majestically, turns, and raises his right hand in salutation to the Palace.*)

APOLLO

DWELLING of Admetus, wherein I, a God, deigned to accept the food of serfs!

The cause was Zeus. He struck Asclepius, my son, full in the breast with a bolt of thunder, and laid him dead. Then in wild rage I slew the Cyclopes who forge the fire of Zeus. To atone for this my Father forced me to labour as a hireling for a mortal man; and I came to this country, and tended oxen for my host. To this hour I have protected him and his. I, who am just, chanced on the son of Pheres, a just man, whom I have saved from Death by tricking the Fates. The Goddesses pledged me their faith Admetus should escape immediate death if, in exchange, another corpse were given to the Under-Gods.

One by one he tested all his friends, and even his father and the old mother who had brought him forth—and found none that would die for him and never more behold the light of day, save only his wife. Now, her spirit waiting to break loose, she droops upon his arm within the house; this is the day when she must die and render up her life.

But I must leave this Palace's dear roof, for fear pollution soil me in the house.

See! Death, Lord of All the Dead, now comes to lead her to the house of Hades! Most punctually he comes! How well he marked the day she had to die!

(*From the right comes* DEATH, *with a drawn sword in his hand. He moves stealthily towards the Palace; then sees* APOLLO *and halts abruptly. The two Deities confront each other.*)

DEATH

Ha! Phoebus! You! Before this Palace! Lawlessly would you grasp, abolish the rights of the Lower Gods! Did you not beguile the Fates and snatch Admetus from the grave? Does not that suffice? Now, once again, you have armed your hand with the bow, to guard the daughter of Pelias who must die in her husband's stead!

APOLLO

Fear not! I hold for right, and proffer you just words.

DEATH

If you hold for right, why then your bow?

APOLLO

My custom is ever to carry it.

DEATH

Yes! And you use it unjustly to aid this house!

APOLLO

I grieve for a friend's woe.

DEATH

So you would rob me of a second body?

APOLLO

Not by force I won the other.

DEATH

Why, then, is he in the world and not below the ground?

APOLLO

In his stead he gives his wife—whom you have come to take.

DEATH

And shall take—to the Underworld below the earth!

APOLLO

Take her, and go! I know not if I can persuade you . . .

DEATH

Not to kill her I must kill? I am appointed to that task.

APOLLO

No, no! But to delay death for those about to die.

DEATH

I hear your words and guess your wish!

APOLLO

May not Alcestis live to old age?

DEATH

No! I also prize my rights!

APOLLO

Yet at most you win one life.

DEATH

They who die young yield me a greater prize.

APOLLO

If she dies old, the burial will be richer.

DEATH

Phoebus, that argument favours the rich.

APOLLO

What! Are you witty unawares?

DEATH

The rich would gladly pay to die old.

APOLLO

So you will not grant me this favour?

DEATH

Not I! You know my nature.

APOLLO

Yes! Hateful to men and a horror to the gods!

DEATH

You cannot always have more than your due.

APOLLO

Yet you shall change, most cruel though you are! For a man comes to the dwelling of Pheres, sent by Eurystheus to fetch a horse-drawn chariot from the harsh-wintered lands of Thrace; and he shall be a guest in the house of Admetus, and by force shall he tear this woman from you. Thus shall you gain no thanks from us, and yet you shall do this thing—and my hatred be upon you!

(APOLLO *goes out.* DEATH *gazes after him derisively.*)

DEATH

Talk all you will, you get no more of me! The woman shall go down to the dwelling of Hades.

Now must I go to consecrate her for the sacrifice with this sword; for when once this blade has shorn the victim's hair, then he is sacred to the Lower Gods!

(DEATH *enters the Palace by the open main door. The* CHORUS *enters from the right. They are the Elders or Notables of the city, and therefore move slowly, leaning upon their staffs.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*chanting*)

Why is there no sound outside the Palace? Why is the dwelling of Admetus silent? Not a friend here to tell me if I must weep for a dead Queen or whether she lives and looks upon the light, Alcestis, the daughter of Pelias, whom among all women I hold the best wife to her spouse!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Is a sob to be heard?
Or the beating of hands
In the house?
The lament for her end?
Not one,
Not one of her servants
Stands at the gate!

Ah! to roll back the wave of our woe,
O Healer,
Appear!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Were she dead
They had not been silent.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

She is but a dead body!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Yet she has not departed the house.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Ah! Let me not boast!
Why do you cling to hope?

First Semi-Chorus

Would Admetus bury her solitary,
Make a grave alone for a wife so dear?

Chorus

At the gate I see not
The lustral water from the spring
Which stands at the gates of the dead!
No shorn tress in the portal
Laid in lament for the dead!
The young women beat not their hands!

Second Semi-Chorus

Yet to-day is the day appointed. . . .

First Semi-Chorus

Ah! What have you said?

Second Semi-Chorus

When she must descend under earth!

First Semi-Chorus

You have pierced my soul!
You have pierced my mind!

Second Semi-Chorus

He that for long
Has been held in esteem
Must weep when the good are destroyed.

Chorus

No!
There is no place on earth
To send forth a suppliant ship—
Not to Lycia,
Not to Ammon's waterless shrine—
To save her from death!
The dreadful doom is at hand.
To what laden altar of what God
Shall I turn my steps?

He alone—
If the light yet shone for his eye—
Asclepius, Phoebus's son,
Could have led her back

From the land of shadows,
From the gates of Hades.
For he raised the dead
Ere the Zeus-driven shaft
Slew him with thunder fire. . . .
But now
What hope can I hold for her life?

LEADER (*chanting*)
The King has fulfilled
Every rite;
The altars of all the Gods
Drip with the blood of slain beasts:
Nothing, nothing avails.

(*From the women's quarters in the left wing of the Palace comes a woman in tears. She is not a slave, but one of the personal attendants on the Queen.*)

But now from the house comes one of her women servants, all in tears. What now shall I learn? (*To the weeping Servant*) It is well to weep when our lords are in sorrow—but tell us, we would know, is she alive, is she dead?

SERVANT
You may say she is both alive and dead.

LEADER
How can the same man be dead and yet behold the light?

SERVANT
She gasps, she is on the verge of death.

LEADER
Ah, unhappy man! For such a husband what loss is such a wife!

SERVANT
The King will not know his loss until he suffers it.

LEADER
Then there is no hope that her life may be saved?

SERVANT
The fated day constrains her.

LEADER
Are all things befitting prepared for her?

SERVANT

The robes in which her lord will bury her are ready.

LEADER

Then let her know that she dies gloriously, the best of women beneath the sun by far!

SERVANT

How should she not be the best! Who shall deny it? What should the best among women be? How better might a woman hold faith to her lord than gladly to die for him? This the whole city knows, but you will marvel when you hear what she has done within the house. When she knew that the last of her days was come she bathed her white body in river water, she took garments and gems from her rooms of cedar wood, and clad herself nobly; then, standing before the hearth-shrine, she uttered this prayer:

'O Goddess, since now I must descend beneath the earth, for the last time I make supplication to you: and entreat you to protect my motherless children. Wed my son to a fair bride, and my daughter to a noble husband. Let not my children die untimely, as I their mother am destroyed, but grant that they live out happy lives with good fortune in their own land!'

To every altar in Admetus's house she went, hung them with garlands, offered prayer, cut myrtle boughs—unweeping, unlamenting; nor did the coming doom change the bright colour of her face.

Then to her marriage-room she went, flung herself down upon her bed, and wept, and said:

'O my marriage-bed, wherein I loosed my virgin girdle to him for whom I die! Farewell! I have no hatred for you. Only me you lose. Because I held my faith to you and to my lord—I must die. Another woman shall possess you, not more chaste indeed than I, more fortunate perhaps.'

She fell upon her knees and kissed it, and all the bed was damp with the tide of tears which flooded to her eyes. And when she was fulfilled of many tears, drooping she rose from her bed and made as if to go, and many times she turned to go and many times turned back, and flung herself once more upon the bed.

Her children clung to their mother's dress, and wept; and she clasped them in her arms and kissed them turn by turn, as a dying woman.

All the servants in the house wept with compassion for their Queen. But she held out her hand to each, and there was none so base to whom she did not speak, and who did not reply again.

Such is the misery in Admetus's house. If he had died, he would be nothing now; and, having escaped, he suffers an agony he will never forget.

LEADER

And does Admetus lament this woe—since he must be robbed of so noble a woman?

SERVANT

He weeps, and clasps in his arms his dear bedfellow, and cries to her not to abandon him, asking impossible things. For she pines, and is wasted by sickness. She falls away, a frail burden on his arm; and yet, though faintly, she still breathes, still strives to look upon the sunlight, which she shall never see hereafter—since now for the last time she looks upon the orb and splendour of the sun!

I go, and shall announce that you are here; for all men are not so well-minded to their lords as loyally to stand near them in misfortunes, but you for long have been a friend to both my lords.

(*She goes back into the women's quarters of the Palace. The* CHORUS *now begins to sing.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

O Zeus,
What end to these woes?
What escape from the Fate
Which oppresses our lords?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Will none come forth?
Must I shear my hair?
Must we wrap ourselves
In black mourning folds?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

It is certain, O friends, it is certain!
But still let us cry to the Gods;
Very great is the power of the Gods.

CHORUS

O King, O Healer,
Seek out appeasement
To Admetus's agony!
Grant this, Oh, grant it!
Once before did you find it;
Now once more
Be the Releaser from death.
The Restrainer of blood-drenched Hades!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Alas!
O son of Pheres.
What ills shall you suffer
Being robbed of your spouse!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

At sight of such woes
Shall we cut our throats?
Shall we slip
A dangling noose round our necks?

CHORUS

See! See!
She comes
From the house with her lord!
Cry out, Oh, lament.
O land of Pherae,
For the best of women
Fades away in her doom
Under the earth,
To dark Hades!

(*From the central door of the Palace comes a splendid but tragical procession. Preceded by the royal guards,* ADMETUS *enters, supporting* ALCESTIS. *The two children, a boy and a girl, cling to their mother's dress. There is a train of attendants and waiting women, who bring a low throne for the fainting* ALCESTIS.)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*chanting*)

Never shall I say that we ought to rejoice in marriage, but rather weep; this have I seen from of old and now I look upon the fate of the King, who loses the best of wives, and henceforth until the end his life shall be intolerable.

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)

Sun, and you, light of day,
Vast whirlings of swift cloud!

ADMETUS

The sun looks upon you and me, both of us miserable, who have wrought nothing against the Gods to deserve death.

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)
O Earth, O roof-tree of my home,
Bridal-bed of my country, Iolcus!

ADMETUS
Rouse up, O unhappy one, and do not leave me! Call upon the mighty Gods to pity!

ALCESTIS
(*starting up and gazing wildly in terror, chanting*)
I see the two-oared boat,
I see the boat on the lake!
And Charon,
Ferryman of the Dead,
Calls to me, his hand on the oar:
'Why linger? Hasten! You delay me!'
Angrily he urges me.

ADMETUS
Alas! How bitter to me is that ferrying of which you speak! O my unhappy one, how we suffer!

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)
He drags me, he drags me away—
Do you not see?—
To the House of the Dead,
The Winged One
Glaring under dark brows,
Hades!—
What is it you do?
Set me free!—
What a path must I travel,
O most hapless of women!

ADMETUS
O piteous to those that love you, above all to me and to these children who sorrow in this common grief!

ALCESTIS (*chanting*)
Loose me, Oh, loose me now;
Lay me down;
All strength is gone from my feet.

(*She falls back in the throne.*)

Hades draws near!

Dark night falls on my eyes,
My children, my children,
Never more, Oh, never more
Shall your mother be yours!
O children, farewell,
Live happy in the light of day!

ADMETUS (*chanting*)

Alas! I hear this unhappy speech, and for me it is worse than all death. Ah! By the Gods, do not abandon me! Ah! By our children, whom you leave motherless, take heart! If you die, I become as nothing; in you we have our life and death; we revere your love.

ALCESTIS (*recovering herself*)

Admetus, you see the things I suffer; and now before I die I mean to tell you what I wish.

To show you honour and—at the cost of my life—that you may still behold the light, I die; and yet I might have lived and wedded any in Thessaly I chose, and dwelt with happiness in a royal home. But, torn from you, I would not live with fatherless children, nor have I hoarded up those gifts of youth in which I found delight. Yet he who begot you, she who brought you forth, abandoned you when it had been beautiful in them to die, beautiful to die with dignity to save their son! They had no child but you, no hope if you were dead that other children might be born to them. Thus I should have lived my life out, and you too, and you would not lament as now, made solitary from your wife, that you must rear our children motherless!

But these things are a God's doing and are thus.

Well! Do not forget this gift, for I shall ask—not a recompense, since nothing is more precious than life, but—only what is just, as you yourself will say, since if you have not lost your senses you must love these children no less than I. Let them be masters in my house; marry not again, and set a stepmother over them, a woman harsher than I, who in her jealousy will lift her hand against my children and yours. Ah! not this, let not this be, I entreat you! The new stepmother hates the first wife's children, the viper itself is not more cruel. The son indeed finds a strong rampart in his father—but you, my daughter, how shall you live your virgin life out in happiness? How will you fare with your father's new wife? Ah! Let her not cast evil report upon you and thus wreck your marriage in the height of your youth! You will have no mother, O my child, to give you in marriage, to comfort you in childbed when none is tenderer than a mother!

And I must die. Not to-morrow, nor to-morrow's morrow comes this

misfortune on me, but even now I shall be named with those that are no more. Farewell! Live happy! You, my husband, may boast you had the best of wives; and you, my children, that you lost the best of mothers!
(*She falls back.*)

LEADER

Take heart! I do not hesitate to speak for him. This he will do, unless he has lost his senses.

ADMETUS

It shall be so, it shall be! Have no fear! And since I held you living as my wife, so, when dead, you only shall be called my wife, and in your place no bride of Thessaly shall salute me hers; no other woman is noble enough for that, no other indeed so beautiful of face. My children shall suffice me; I pray the Gods I may enjoy them, since you we have not enjoyed.

I shall wear mourning for you, O my wife, not for one year but all my days, abhorring the woman who bore me, hating my father—for they loved me in words, not deeds. But you—to save my life you give the dearest thing you have! Should I not weep then, losing such a wife as you?

I shall make an end of merry drinking parties, and of flower-crowned feasts and of the music which possessed my house. Never again shall I touch the lyre, never again shall I raise my spirits to sing to the Libyan flute—for you have taken from me all my joy. Your image, carven by the skilled hands of artists, shall be laid in our marriage-bed; I shall clasp it, and my hands shall cling to it and I shall speak your name and so, not having you, shall think I have my dear wife in my arms—a cold delight, I know, but it will lighten the burden of my days. Often you will gladden me, appearing in my dreams; for sweet it is to look on those we love in dreams, however brief the night.

Ah! If I had the tongue and song of Orpheus so that I might charm Demeter's Daughter or her Lord, and snatch you back from Hades, I would go down to hell; and neither Pluto's dog nor Charon, Leader of the Dead, should hinder me until I had brought your life back to the light!

At least await me there whenever I shall die, and prepare the house where you will dwell with me. I shall lay a solemn charge upon these children to stretch me in the same cedar shroud with you, and lay my side against your side; for even in death let me not be separate from you, you who alone were faithful to me!

LEADER (*to* ADMETUS)

And I also will keep this sad mourning with you, as a friend with a friend; for she is worthy of it.

ALCESTIS

O my children, you have heard your father say that never will he set another wife over you and never thus insult me.

ADMETUS

Again I say it, and will perform it too!

ALCESTIS (*placing the children's hands in his*)

Then take these children from my hand.

ADMETUS

I take them—dear gifts from a dear hand.

ALCESTIS

Now you must be the mother for me to my children.

ADMETUS

It must be so, since they are robbed of you.

ALCESTIS

O children, I should have lived my life out—and I go to the Underworld.

ADMETUS

Alas! What shall *I* do, left alone by you?

ALCESTIS

Time will console you. The dead are nothing.

ADMETUS

Take me with you, by the Gods! Take me to the Underworld!

ALCESTIS

It is enough that I should die—for you.

ADMETUS

O Fate, what a wife you steal from me!

ALCESTIS (*growing faint*)

My dimmed eyes are heavily oppressed.

ADMETUS

O woman, I am lost if you leave me!

ALCESTIS

You may say of me that I am nothing.

ADMETUS

Lift up your head! Do not abandon your children!

ALCESTIS

Ah! Indeed it is unwillingly—but, farewell, my children!

ADMETUS

Look at them, look. . . .

ALCESTIS

I am nothing.

ADMETUS

What are you doing? Are you leaving me?

ALCESTIS (*falling back dead*)

Farewell.

ADMETUS (*staring at the body*)

Wretch that I am, I am lost!

LEADER

She is gone! The wife of Admetus is no more.

EUMELUS (*chanting*)

Ah! Misery!
Mother has gone,
Gone to the Underworld!
She lives no more,
O my Father,
In the sunlight.
O sad one,
You have left us
To live motherless!

See, Oh, see her eyelids
And her drooping hands!
Mother, Mother,
Hearken to me, listen,
I beseech you!
I—I—Mother!—
I am calling to you,
Your little bird fallen upon your face!

ADMETUS

She hears not, she sees not. You and I are smitten by a dread calamity.

EUMELUS (*chanting*)

Father, I am a child,
And I am left
Like a lonely ship
By the mother I loved.
Oh! The cruel things I suffer!
And you, little sister,
Suffer with me.

O my Father,
Vain, vain was your wedding,
You did not walk with her
To the end of old age.
She died first;
And your death, O Mother,
Destroys our house.

LEADER

Admetus, you must endure this calamity. You are not the first and will not be the last to lose a noble wife. We all are doomed to die.

ADMETUS

I know it.

Not unawares did this woe swoop down on me; for long it has gnawed at me.

But, since I shall ordain the funeral rites for this dead body, you must be there, and meanwhile let a threnody re-echo to the implacable God of the Underworld. And all you men of Thessaly whom I rule—I order you to share the mourning for this woman with severed hair and black-robed garb. You who yoke the four-horsed chariot and the swift single horses, cut the mane from their necks with your steel.

Let there be no noise of flutes or lyre within the city until twelve moons are fulfilled. Never shall I bury another body so dear to me, never one that has loved me better. From me she deserves all honour, since she alone would die for me!

(*The body of* ALCESTIS *is carried solemnly into the Palace, followed by* ADMETUS, *with bowed head, holding one of his children by each hand. When all have entered, the great doors are quietly shut.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Daughter of Pelias,
Hail to you in the house of Hades,
In the sunless home where you shall dwell!
Let Hades, the dark-haired God,
Let the old man, Leader of the Dead,
Who sits at the oar and helm,
Know you:
Far, far off is the best of women
Borne beyond the flood of Acheron
In the two-oared boat!

antistrophe 1

Often shall the Muses' servants
Sing of you to the seven-toned
Lyre-shell of the mountain-tortoise,
And praise you with mourning songs at Sparta
When the circling season
Brings back the month Carneius [1]
Under the nightlong upraised moon,
And in bright glad Athens.
Such a theme do you leave by your death
For the music of singers!

strophe 2

Ah! That I had the power
To bring you back to the light
From the dark halls of Hades,
And from the waves of Cocytus
With the oar of the river of hell!
Oh, you only,
O dearest of women,
You only dared give your life
For the life of your lord in Hades!
Light rest the earth above you,
O woman.
If your lord choose another bridal-bed
He shall be hateful to me
As to your own children.

antistrophe 2

When his mother
And the old father that begot him

Would not give their bodies to the earth
For their son's sake,
They dared not deliver him—O cruel!
Though their heads were grey.
But you,
In your lively youth,
Died for him, and are gone from the light!
Ah! might I be joined
With a wife so dear!
But in life such fortune is rare.
How happy were my days with her!

(*From the left* HERACLES *enters. He is black-bearded and of great physical strength; he wears a lion-skin over his shoulders and carries a large club.*)

HERACLES (*with a gesture of salutation*)

Friends, dwellers in the lands of Pherae, do I find Admetus in his home?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The son of Pheres is in his home, O Heracles. But, tell us, what brings you to the land of Thessaly and to the city of Pherae?

HERACLES

I have a task I must achieve for Eurystheus of Tiryns.

LEADER

Where do you go? To what quest are you yoked?

HERACLES

The quest of the four-horsed chariot of Diomedes, the Thracian.

LEADER

But how will you achieve it? Do you know this stranger?

HERACLES

No, I have never been to the land of the Bistones.

LEADER

You cannot obtain the horses without a struggle.

HERACLES

I cannot renounce my labours.

LEADER

You must kill to return, or you will remain there dead.

HERACLES
It will not be the first contest I have risked.

LEADER
And if you conquer the King will you gain anything?

HERACLES
I shall bring back his foals to the lord of Tiryns.

LEADER
It is not easy to thrust the bit into their jaws.

HERACLES
Only if they breathe fire from their nostrils!

LEADER
But they tear men with their swift jaws.

HERACLES
You speak of the food of wild mountain beasts, not of horses.

LEADER
You may see their mangers foul with blood.

HERACLES
Of what father does the breeder boast himself the son?

LEADER
Of Ares, the lord of the gold-rich shield of Thrace!

HERACLES
In this task once more you remind me of my fate, which is ever upon harsh steep ways, since I must join battle with the sons of Ares—first with Lycaon, then with Cycnus, and now in this third contest I am come to match myself with these steeds and their master!

LEADER
But see, the lord of this land, Admetus himself, comes from the house!

(*The central doors of the Palace have opened, and* ADMETUS *comes slowly on the Stage, preceded and followed by guards and attendants. The King has put off all symbols of royalty, and is dressed in black. His long hair is clipped close to his head.* ADMETUS *dissembles his grief throughout this scene, in obedience to the laws of hospitality, which were particularly reverenced in Thessaly.*)

ADMETUS
Hail! Son of Zeus and of the blood of Perseus!

HERACLES
And hail to you, Admetus, lord of the Thessalians!

ADMETUS
May it be so! I know your friendship well.

HERACLES
What means this shorn hair, this mourning robe?

ADMETUS
To-day I must bury a dead body.

HERACLES
May a God avert harm from your children!

ADMETUS
The children I have begotten are alive in the house.

HERACLES
Your father was ripe for death—if it is he has gone?

ADMETUS
He lives—and she who brought me forth, O Heracles.

HERACLES
Your wife—Alcestis—she is not dead?

ADMETUS (*evasively*)
Of her I might make a double answer.

HERACLES
Do you mean that she is dead or alive?

ADMETUS (*ambiguously*)
She is and is not—and for this I grieve.

HERACLES (*perplexed*)
I am no wiser—you speak obscurely.

ADMETUS
Did you not know the fate which must befall her?

HERACLES
I know she submitted to die for you.

ADMETUS
How then can she be alive, having consented to this?

HERACLES
Ah! Do not weep for your wife till that time comes.

ADMETUS
Those who are about to die are dead, and the dead are nothing.

HERACLES
Men hold that to be and not to be are different things.

ADMETUS
You hold for one, Heracles, and I for the other.

HERACLES
Whom, then, do you mourn? Which of your friends is dead?

ADMETUS
A woman. We spoke of her just now.

HERACLES (*mistaking his meaning*)
A stranger? Or one born of your kin?

ADMETUS
A stranger, but one related to this house.

HERACLES
But how, then, did she chance to die in your house?

ADMETUS
When her father died she was sheltered here.

HERACLES
Alas! Would I had not found you in this grief, Admetus!

ADMETUS
What plan are you weaving with those words?

HERACLES
I shall go to the hearth of another friend.

ADMETUS
Not so, O King! This wrong must not be.

HERACLES (*hesitating*)
The coming of a guest is troublesome to those who mourn.

ADMETUS (*decisively*)

The dead are dead. Enter my house.

HERACLES

But it is shameful to feast among weeping friends.

ADMETUS

Well shall put you in the guest-rooms, which are far apart.

HERACLES

Let me go, and I will give you a thousand thanks.

ADMETUS

No, you shall not go to another man's hearth. (*To a servant*) Guide him, and open for him the guest-rooms apart from the house. (HERACLES *enters the Palace by the guests' door; when he has gone in,* ADMETUS *turns to the other servants*) Close the inner door of the courtyard; it is unseemly that guests rejoicing at table should hear lamentations, and be saddened.

(*The attendants go into the Palace.*)

LEADER

What are you about? When such a calamity has fallen upon you, Admetus, have you the heart to entertain a guest? Are you mad?

ADMETUS

And if I had driven away a guest who came to my house and city, would you have praised me more? No, indeed! My misfortune would have been no less, and I inhospitable. One more ill would have been added to those I have if my house were called inhospitable. I myself find him the best of hosts when I enter the thirsty land of Argos.

LEADER

But why did you hide from him the fate that has befallen, if the man came as a friend, as you say?

ADMETUS

Never would he have entered my house if he had guessed my misfortune.

To some, I know, I shall appear senseless in doing this, and they will blame me; but my roof knows not to reject or insult a guest.

(*He goes into the Palace, as the* CHORUS *begins its song.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O house of a bountiful lord,
Ever open to many guests,
The God of Pytho,
Apollo of the beautiful lyre,
Deigned to dwell in you
And to live a shepherd in your lands!
On the slope of the hillsides
He played melodies of mating
On the Pipes of Pan to his herds.

antistrophe 1

And the dappled lynxes fed with them
In joy at your singing;
From the wooded vale of Orthrys
Came a yellow troop of lions;
To the sound of your lyre, O Phoebus,
Danced the dappled fawn
Moving on light feet
Beyond the high-crested pines,
Charmed by your sweet singing.

strophe 2

He dwells in a home most rich in flocks
By the lovely moving Boebian lake.
At the dark stabling-place of the Sun
He takes the sky of the Molossians
As a bourne to his ploughing of fields,
To the soils of his plains;
He bears sway
As far as the harbourless
Coast of the Aegean Sea,
As far as Pelion.

antistrophe 2

Even to-day he opened his house
And received a guest,
Though his eyelids were wet
With tears wept by the corpse
Of a dear bedfellow dead in the house.
For the noble spirit is proclaimed by honour;
All wisdom lies with the good.
I admire him:

And in my soul I know
The devout man shall have joy.

(*The funeral procession of* ALCESTIS *enters from the door of the women's quarters. The body, carried on a bier by men servants, is followed by* ADMETUS *and his two children. Behind them comes a train of attendants and servants carrying the funeral offerings. All are in mourning.* ADMETUS *addresses the* CHORUS.)

ADMETUS

O friendly presence of you men of Pherae! Now that the body is prepared, and the servants bear it on high to the tomb and the fire, do you, as is fitting, salute the dead as she goes forth on her last journey.

(PHERES, *the father of* ADMETUS, *enters, followed by attendants bearing funeral offerings.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I see your father, tottering with an old man's walk, and his followers bearing in their hands for your wife garments as an offering to the dead.

PHERES

My son, I have come to share your sorrow, for the wife you have lost was indeed noble and virtuous—none can deny it. But these things must be endured, however intolerable they may be.

Take these garments, and let her descend under the earth. Her body must be honoured, for she died to save your life, my son; she has not made me childless, nor left me to be destroyed without you in my hapless old age; and she has given glorious fame to all women by daring so noble a deed! (*He lifts his hand in salutation to the body of* ALCESTIS.) O woman, who saved my son, who raised me up when I had fallen, hail! Be happy in the halls of Hades! I declare it—such marriages are profitable to mankind; otherwise, it is foolish to marry.

ADMETUS (*furiously*)

It was not my wish that you should come to this burial, and I deny that your presence is that of a friend! She shall never wear these garments of yours; she needs not your gifts for her burial. You should have grieved when I was about to die; but you stood aside, and now do you come to wail over a corpse when you, an old man, allowed a young woman to die?

Were you in very truth father of this body of mine? Did she, who claims to be and is called my mother, bring me forth? Or was I bred of a slave's seed and secretly brought to your wife's breast? You have proved

what you are when it comes to the test, and therefore I am not your begotten son; or you surpass all men in cowardice, for, being at the very verge and end of life, you had neither courage nor will to die for your son. But this you left to a woman, a stranger, whom alone I hold as my father and my mother!

Yet it had been a beautiful deed in you to die for your son, and short indeed was the time left you to live. She and I would have lived out our lives, and I should not now be here alone lamenting my misery.

You enjoyed all that a happy man can enjoy—you passed the flower of your age as a king, and in me your son you had an heir to your dominion; you would not have died childless, leaving an orphaned house to be plundered by strangers. You will not say that you abandoned me to death because I dishonoured your old age, for above all I was respectful to you—and this is the gratitude I have from you and my mother!

Beget more sons, and quickly, to cherish your old age and wrap you in a shroud when dead and lay your body out in state! This hand of mine shall not inter you. I am dead to you. I look upon the light of day because another saved me—I say I am her son, and will cherish her old age!

Vainly do old men pray for death, regretting their age and the long span of life. If death draws near, none wants to die, and age is no more a burden to him.

LEADER

Admetus! The present misfortune is enough. Do not provoke your father's spirit.

(ADMETUS *turns angrily to depart, but* PHERES *prevents him.*)

PHERES

My son, do you think you are pursuing some hireling Lydian or Phrygian with your taunts? Do you know I am a Thessalian, a free man lawfully begotten by a Thessalian father? You are over-insolent, and you shall not leave thus, after wounding me with your boyish insults. I indeed begot you, and bred you up to be lord of this land, but I am not bound to die for you. It is not a law of our ancestors or of Hellas that the fathers should die for the children! You were born to live your own life, whether miserable or fortunate; and what is due to you from me you have. You rule over many men, and I shall leave you many wide fields even as I received them from my own father. How, then, have I wronged you? Of what have I robbed you? Do not die for me, any more than I die for you. You love to look upon the light of day—do you think your father hates it? I tell myself that we are a long time underground and that life is short, but sweet.

But you—you strove shamelessly not to die, and you are alive, you shirked your fate by killing her! And you call me a coward, you, the worst of cowards, surpassed by a woman who died for you, pretty boy? And now you insult those who should be dear to you, when they refuse to die for a coward like you!

Be silent! Learn that if you love your life, so do others. If you utter insults, you shall hear many, and true ones too!

LEADER

These insults and those that went before suffice. Old man, cease to revile your son.

ADMETUS (*to* PHERES)

Speak on! I shall refute you. If the truth wounds you when you hear it you should not have wronged me.

PHERES

I should have wronged you far more if I had died for you.

ADMETUS

It is the same then to die an old man and in the flower of life?

PHERES

We should live one life, not two.

ADMETUS

May you live longer than God!

PHERES

Do you curse your parents when they have done you no wrong?

ADMETUS

I see you are in love with long life.

PHERES

But you are not carrying her dead body in place of your own?

ADMETUS

It is the proof of your cowardice, O worst of men.

PHERES

You cannot say she died for me!

ADMETUS

Alas! May you one day need my help.

PHERES

Woo many women, so that more may die for you.

ADMETUS

To your shame be it—you who dared not die.

PHERES

Sweet is the daylight of the Gods, very sweet.

ADMETUS

Your spirit is mean, not a man's.

PHERES

Would you laugh to carry an old man's body to the grave?

ADMETUS

You will die infamous, whenever you die.

PHERES

It will matter little enough to me to hear ill of myself when I am dead!

ADMETUS

Alas! Alas! How full of impudence is old age!

PHERES

She was not impudent, but foolish.

ADMETUS

Go! Leave me to bury her body.

PHERES (*turning away*)

I go. You, her murderer, will bury her—but soon you must render an account to her relatives. Acastus is not a man if he fails to avenge his sister's blood on you!

(PHERES *goes out by the way he entered, followed by his attendants.* ADMETUS *gazes angrily after him.*)

ADMETUS

Go with a curse, you, and she who dwells with you! Grow old, as you ought, childless though you have a child. You shall never return to this house. And if I could renounce your hearth as my father's by heralds, I would do it. But we—since this sorrow must be endured—let us go, and set her body on the funeral pyre.

(*The Procession moves slowly along the stage, and is joined by the* CHORUS. *As they pass, the* LEADER *salutes the body of* ALCESTIS.)

LEADER (*chanting*)

Alas! Alas! You who suffer for your courage, O noblest and best of women, hail! May Hermes of the Dead, may Hades, greet you kindly. If there are rewards for the dead, may you share them as you sit by the bride of the Lord of the Dead!

(*The Procession has filed out. A servant in mourning hurries out from the guests' quarters.*)

SERVANT

Many guests from every land, I know, have come to the Palace of Admetus, and I have set food before them, but never one worse than this guest have I welcomed to the hearth.

First, though he saw our Lord was in mourning, he entered, and dared to pass through the gates. Then, knowing our misfortune, he did not soberly accept what was offered him, but if anything was not served to him he ordered us to bring it. In both hands he took a cup of ivy-wood, and drank the unmixed wine of the dark grape-mother, until he was encompassed and heated with the flame of wine. He crowned his head with myrtle sprays, howling discordant songs. There was he caring nothing for Admetus's misery, and we servants weeping for our Queen; and yet we hid our tear-laden eyes from the guest, for so Admetus had commanded.

And now in the Palace I must entertain this stranger, some villainous thief and brigand, while she, the Queen I mourn, has gone from the house unfollowed, unsaluted, she who was as a mother to me and all us servants, for she sheltered us from a myriad troubles by softening her husband's wrath.

Am I not right, then, to hate this stranger, who came to us in the midst of sorrow?

(HERACLES *comes from the Palace. He is drunkenly merry, with a myrtle wreath on his head, and a large cup and wine-skin in his hands. He staggers a little.*)

HERACLES

Hey, you! Why so solemn and anxious? A servant should not be sullen with guests, but greet them with a cheerful heart.

You see before you a man who is your lord's friend, and you greet him with a gloomy, frowning face, because of your zeal about a strange woman's death. Come here, and let me make you a little wiser!

(*With drunken gravity*) Know the nature of human life? Don't think you do. You couldn't. Listen to me. All mortals must die. Isn't one who knows if he'll be alive to-morrow morning. Who knows where Fortune will lead? Nobody can teach it. Nobody learn it by rules. So, rejoice in

what you hear, and learn from me! Drink! Count each day as it comes as Life—and leave the rest to Fortune. Above all, honour the Love Goddess, sweetest of all the Gods to mortal men, a kindly goddess! Put all the rest aside. Trust in what I say, if you think I speak truth—as I believe. Get rid of this gloom, rise superior to Fortune. Crown yourself with flowers and drink with me, won't you? I know the regular clink of the wine-cup will row you from darkness and gloom to another haven. Mortals should think mortal thoughts. To all solemn and frowning men, life I say is not life, but a disaster.

SERVANT

We know all that, but what we endure here to-day is far indeed from gladness and laughter.

HERACLES

But the dead woman was a stranger. Lament not overmuch, then, for the Lords of this Palace are still alive.

SERVANT

How, alive? Do you not know the misery of this house?

HERACLES

Your lord did not lie to me?

SERVANT

He goes too far in hospitality!

HERACLES

But why should I suffer for a stranger's death?

SERVANT

It touches this house only too nearly.

HERACLES

Did he hide some misfortune from me?

SERVANT

Go in peace! The miseries of our lords concern us.

HERACLES

That speech does not imply mourning for a stranger!

SERVANT

No, or I should not have been disgusted to see you drinking.

HERACLES

Have I then been basely treated by my host?

SERVANT

You did not come to this house at a welcome hour. We are in mourning. You see my head is shaved and the black garments I wear.

HERACLES

But who, then, is dead? One of the children? The old father?

SERVANT

O stranger, Admetus no longer has a wife.

HERACLES

What! And yet I was received in this way?

SERVANT

He was ashamed to send you away from his house.

HERACLES

O hapless one! What a wife you have lost!

SERVANT

Not she alone, but all of us are lost.

HERACLES (*now completely sobered*)

I felt there was something when I saw his tear-wet eyes, his shaven head, his distracted look. But he persuaded me he was taking the body of a stranger to the grave. Against my will I entered these gates, and drank in the home of this generous man—and he in such grief! And shall I drink at such a time with garlands of flowers on my head? You, why did you not tell me that such misery had come upon this house? Where is he burying her? Where shall I find him?

SERVANT

Beside the straight road which leads to Larissa you will see a tomb of polished stone outside the walls.

(*Returns to the servants' quarters*)

HERACLES

O heart of me, much-enduring heart, O right arm, now indeed must you show what son was born to Zeus by Alcmena, the Tirynthian, daughter of Electryon! For I must save this dead woman, and bring back Alcestis to this house as a grace to Admetus.

I shall watch for Death, the black-robed Lord of the Dead, and I know I shall find him near the tomb, drinking the blood of the sacrifices. If I can leap upon him from an ambush, seize him, grasp him in my arms, no power in the world shall tear his bruised sides from me until he has yielded up this woman. If I miss my prey, if he does not come near the

bleeding sacrifice, I will go down to Kore and her lord in their sunless dwelling, and I will make my entreaty to them, and I know they will give me Alcestis to bring back to the hands of the host who welcomed me, who did not repulse me from his house, though he was smitten with a heavy woe which most nobly he hid from me! Where would be a warmer welcome in Thessaly or in all the dwellings of Hellas?

He shall not say he was generous to an ingrate!

(HERACLES *goes out. Presently* ADMETUS *and his attendants, followed by the* CHORUS, *return from the burial of* ALCESTIS.)

ADMETUS (*chanting*)

Alas!

Hateful approach, hateful sight of my widowed house! Oh me! Oh me! Alas! Whither shall I go? Where rest? What can I say? What refrain from saying? Why can I not die? Indeed my mother bore me for a hapless fate. I envy the dead, I long to be with them, theirs are the dwellings where I would be. Without pleasure I look upon the light of day and set my feet upon the earth—so precious a hostage has Death taken from me to deliver unto Hades!

CHORUS

(*chanting responsively with* ADMETUS)

Go forward,
Enter your house.

ADMETUS

Alas!

CHORUS

Your grief deserves our tears.

ADMETUS

O Gods!

CHORUS

I know you have entered into sorrow.

ADMETUS

Woe! Woe!

CHORUS

Yet you bring no aid to the dead.

ADMETUS

Oh me! Oh me!

CHORUS

Heavy shall it be for you
Never to look again
On the face of the woman you love.

ADMETUS

You bring to my mind the grief that breaks my heart. What sorrow is worse for a man than the loss of such a woman? I would I had never married, never shared my house with her. I envy the wifeless and the childless. They live but one life—what is suffering to them? But the sickness of children, bridal-beds ravished by Death —dreadful! when we might be wifeless and childless to the end.

CHORUS

Chance, dreadful Chance, has stricken you.

ADMETUS

Alas!

CHORUS

But you set no limit to your grief.

ADMETUS

Ah! Gods!

CHORUS

A heavy burden to bear, and yet . . .

ADMETUS

Woe! Woe!

CHORUS

Courage! You are not the first to lose . . .

ADMETUS

Oh me! Oh me!

CHORUS

A wife.
Different men
Fate crushes with different blows.

ADMETUS

O long grief and mourning for those beloved under the earth!
Why did you stay me from casting myself into the hollow grave to lie down for ever in death by the best of women? Two lives, not one, had then been seized by Hades, most faithful one to the other; and together we should have crossed the lake of the Underworld.

CHORUS

A son most worthy of tears
Was lost to one of my house,
Yet, childless, he suffered with courage,
Though the white was thick in his hair
And his days were far-spent!

ADMETUS

O visage of my house! How shall I enter you? How shall I dwell in you, now that Fate has turned its face from me? How great is the change! Once, of old, I entered my house with marriage-songs and the torches of Pelion, holding a loved woman by the hand, followed by a merry crowd shouting good wishes to her who is dead and to me, because we had joined our lives, being both noble and born of noble lines. To-day, in place of marriage-songs are lamentations; instead of white garments I am clad in mourning, to return to my house and a solitary bed.

CHORUS

Grief has fallen upon you
In the midst of a happy life
Untouched by misfortune.
But your life and your spirit are safe.
She is dead,
She has left your love.
Is this so new?
Ere now many men
Death has severed from wives.

ADMETUS (*speaking*)

O friends, whatsoever may be thought by others, to me it seems that my wife's fate is happier than mine. Now, no pain ever shall touch her again; she has reached the noble end of all her sufferings. But I, I who should have died, I have escaped my fate, only to drag out a wretched life. Only now do I perceive it.[2]

How shall I summon strength to enter this house? Whom shall I greet? Who will greet me in joy at my coming? Whither shall I turn my steps? I shall be driven forth by solitude when I see my bed widowed of my wife, empty the chairs on which she sat, a dusty floor beneath my roof, my children falling at my knees and calling for their mother, and the servants lamenting for the noble lady lost from the house!

Such will be my life within the house. Without, I shall be driven from marriage-feasts and gatherings of the women of Thessaly. I shall not endure to look upon my wife's friends. Those who hate me will say: 'See

how he lives in shame, the man who dared not die, the coward who gave his wife to Hades in his stead! Is that a man? He hates his parents, yet he himself refused to die!'

This evil fame I have added to my other sorrows. O my friends, what then avails it that I live, if I must live in misery and shame?

(*He covers his head with his robe, and crouches in abject misery on the steps of his Palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

I have lived with the Muses
And on lofty heights:
Many doctrines have I learned;
But Fate is above us all.
Nothing avails against Fate—
Neither the Thracian tablets
Marked with Orphic symbols,
Nor the herbs given by Phoebus
To the children of Asclepius
To heal men of their sickness.

antistrophe 1

None can come near to her altars,
None worship her statues;
She regards not our sacrifice.
O sacred goddess,
Bear no more hardly upon me
Than in days overpast!
With a gesture Zeus judges,
But the sentence is yours.
Hard iron yields to your strength;
Your fierce will knows not gentleness.

strophe 2

And the Goddess has bound you
Ineluctably in the gyves of her hands.
Yield.
Can your tears give life to the dead?
For the sons of the Gods
Swoon in the shadow of Death.
Dear was she in our midst,
Dear still among the dead,
For the noblest of women was she
Who lay in your bed.

antistrophe 2

Ah!
Let the grave of your spouse
Be no more counted as a tomb,
But revered as the Gods,
And greeted by all who pass by!
The wanderer shall turn from his path,
Saying: 'She died for her lord;
A blessed spirit she is now.
Hail, O sacred lady, be our friend!'
Thus shall men speak of her.

(ADMETUS *is still crouched on the Palace steps, when* HERACLES *enters from the side, leading a veiled woman.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But see! The son of Alcmena, as I think, comes to your house.

(ADMETUS *uncovers his head, and faces the new-comer.*)

HERACLES

Admetus, a man should speak freely to his friends, and not keep reproaches silent in his heart. Since I was near you in your misfortune, I should have wished to show myself your friend. But you did not tell me the dead body was your wife's, and you took me into your house as if you were in mourning only for a stranger. And I put a garland of flowers upon my head, and poured wine-offerings to the Gods, when your house was filled with lamentation. I blame you, yes, I blame you for this—but I will not upbraid you in your misfortune.

Why I turned back and am here, I shall tell you. Take and keep this woman for me until I have slain the King of the Bistones and return here with the horses of Thrace. If ill happens to me—may I return safely!—I give her to you to serve in your house.

With much striving I won her to my hands. On my way I found public games, worthy of athletes, and I have brought back this woman whom I won as the prize of victory. The winners of the easy tests had horses; heads of cattle were given to those who won in boxing and wrestling. Then came a woman as a prize. Since I was present, it would have been shameful for me to miss this glorious gain. Therefore, as I said, you must take care of this woman, whom I bring to you, not as one stolen but as the prize of my efforts. Perhaps in time you will approve of what I do.

ADMETUS

Not from disdain, nor to treat you as a foe, did I conceal my wife's fate from you. But if you had turned aside to another man's hearth, one

more grief had been added to my sorrow. It was enough that I should weep my woe.

This woman—O King, I beg it may be thus—enjoin some other Thessalian, one who is not in sorrow, to guard her. In Pherae there are many to welcome you. Do not remind me of my grief. Seeing her in my house, I could not restrain my tears. Add not a further anguish to my pain, for what I suffer is too great. And then—where could I harbour a young woman in my house? For she is young—I see by her clothes and jewels. Could she live with the men under my roof? How, then, could she remain chaste, if she moved to and fro among the young men? Heracles, it is not easy to restrain the young. . . . I am thinking of your interests. . . . Must I take her to my dead wife's room? How could I endure her to enter that bed? I fear a double reproach—from my people, who would accuse me of betraying my saviour to slip into another woman's bed, and from my dead wife, who deserves my respect, for which I must take care.

O woman, whosoever you may be, you have the form of Alcestis, and your body is like hers.

Ah! By all the Gods, take her from my sight! Do not insult a broken man. When I look upon her—she seems my wife—my heart is torn asunder—tears flow from my eyes. Miserable creature that I am, now I taste the bitterness of my sorrow.

LEADER

I do not praise this meeting; but, whatever happens, we must accept the gifts of the Gods.

HERACLES

Oh, that I might bring your wife back into the light of day from the dwelling of the Under-Gods, as a gift of grace to you!

ADMETUS

I know you would wish this—but to what end? The dead cannot return to the light of day.

HERACLES

Do not exaggerate, but bear this with decorum.

ADMETUS

Easier to advise than bear the test.

HERACLES

How will it aid you to lament for ever?

ADMETUS
I know—but my love whirls me away.

HERACLES
Love for the dead leads us to tears.

ADMETUS
I am overwhelmed beyond words.

HERACLES
You have lost a good wife—who denies it?

ADMETUS
So that for me there is no more pleasure in life.

HERACLES
Time will heal this open wound.

ADMETUS
You might say Time, if Time were death!

HERACLES
Another woman, a new marriage, shall console you.

ADMETUS
Oh, hush! What have said? A thing unbelievable!

HERACLES
What! You will not marry? Your bed will remain widowed?

ADMETUS
No other woman shall ever lie at my side.

HERACLES
Do you think that avails the dead?

ADMETUS
Wherever she may be, I must do her honour.

HERACLES
I praise you—but men will call you mad.

ADMETUS
Yet never more shall I be called a bridegroom.

HERACLES
I praise your faithful love to your wife.

ADMETUS
May I die if I betray her even when dead!

HERACLES (*offering him the veiled woman's hand*)
Receive her then into your noble house.

ADMETUS
No, by Zeus who begot you, no!

HERACLES
Yet you will do wrong if you do not take her.

ADMETUS
If I do it, remorse will tear my heart.

HERACLES
Yield—perhaps it will be a good thing for you.

ADMETUS
Ah! If only you had not won her in the contest!

HERACLES
But I conquered—and you conquered with me.

ADMETUS
It is true—but let the woman go hence.

HERACLES
She shall go, if she must. But first—ought she to go?

ADMETUS
She must—unless it would anger you.

HERACLES
There is good reason for my zeal.

ADMETUS
You have conquered then—but not for my pleasure.

HERACLES
One day you will praise me for it—be persuaded.

ADMETUS (*to his attendants*)
Lead her in, since she must be received in this house.

HERACLES
No, I cannot leave such a woman to servants.

ADMETUS

Then lead her in yourself, if you wish.

HERACLES

I must leave her in your hands.

ADMETUS

I must not touch her—let her go into the house.

HERACLES

I trust only in your right hand.

ADMETUS

O King, you force me to this against my will.

HERACLES

Put forth your hand and take this woman.

ADMETUS (*turning aside his head*)

It is held out.

HERACLES

As if you were cutting off a Gorgon's head! Do you hold her?

ADMETUS

Yes.

HERACLES

Then keep her. You shall not deny that the son of Zeus is a grateful guest. (*Takes off the veil and shows* ALCESTIS.) Look at her, and see if she is not like your wife. And may joy put an end to all your sorrow!

ADMETUS (*drops her hand and starts back*)

O Gods! What am I to say? Unhoped-for wonder! Do I really look upon my wife? Or I am snared in the mockery of a God?

HERACLES

No, you look upon your wife indeed.

ADMETUS

Beware! May it not be some phantom from the Underworld?

HERACLES

Do not think your guest a sorcerer.

ADMETUS

But do I indeed look upon the wife I buried?

HERACLES
Yes—but I do not wonder at your mistrust.

ADMETUS
Can I touch, speak to her, as my living wife?

HERACLES
Speak to her—you have all you desired.

ADMETUS (*taking* ALCESTIS *in his arms*)
O face and body of the dearest of women! I have you once more, when I thought I should never see you again!

HERACLES
You have her—may the envy of the Gods be averted from you!

ADMETUS
O noble son of greatest Zeus, fortune be yours, and may your Father guard you! But how did you bring her back from the Underworld to the light of day?

HERACLES
By fighting with the spirit who was her master.

ADMETUS
Then did you contend with Death?

HERACLES
I hid by the tomb and leaped upon him.

ADMETUS
But why is she speechless?

HERACLES
You may not hear her voice until she is purified from her consecration to the Lower Gods, and until the third dawn has risen. Lead her in.
And you, Admetus, show as ever a good man's welcome to your guests.
Farewell! I go to fulfil the task set me by the King, the son of Sthenelus.

ADMETUS
Stay with us, and share our hearth.

HERACLES
That may be hereafter, but now I must be gone in haste.
(HERACLES *departs.*)

ADMETUS (*gazing after him*)

Good fortune to you, and come back here! (*To the* CHORUS) In all the city and in the four quarters of Thessaly let there be choruses to rejoice at this good fortune, and let the altars smoke with the flesh of oxen in sacrifice! To-day we have changed the past for a better life. I am happy.

(*He leads* ALCESTIS *into the Palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Spirits have many shapes,[3]
Many strange things are performed by the Gods.
The expected does not always happen,
And God makes a way for the unexpected.
So ends this action.

NOTES FOR ALCESTIS

THE translation of Richard Aldington, which appeared in 1930, is noteworthy particularly because of its rendering of the choral passages. In general his scheme of translation is that followed by P. E. More in his version of *Prometheus Bound*. The dialogue portions are done in prose, while the lyric sections are marked by verse of effective simplicity and restraint. Some portions of Aldington's stage directions have been deleted, since they contain information which appears elsewhere in this book. Unfortunately Aldington has omitted the following lines of the original: 231–232, 505–506, 699–701, and 1138.

1. This is the Spartan name for the month which corresponds to parts of August and September.

2. At this point Admetus becomes aware of the full implications of the situation.

3. These lines are found likewise at the conclusion of the *Helen*, *The Bacchae*, *Andromache*, and, with a slight addition, the *Medea*.

II
MEDEA

Characters in the Play

Nurse of Medea
Attendant on her Children
Medea
Chorus of Corinthian Women
Creon, *King of Corinth*
Jason
Aegeus, *King of Athens*
Messenger
The two Sons of Jason and Medea

INTRODUCTION

IN THE *Medea*, produced in 431 B.C., seven years after the *Alcestis*, Euripides has turned to the familiar and romantic myth of the Argonauts. Jason has been ordered by his wicked uncle, Pelias, to procure the golden fleece owned and jealously guarded by Aeëtes, king of far-off Colchis. He therefore gathered a band of Greek heroes and demi-gods, built the Argo, the first ship of Greece, and sailed on the expedition which was intended to prove fatal to its commander. Jason gained possession of the fleece, but only through the assistance of the Colchian princess, Medea, who had fallen deeply in love with him. She was endowed with the supernatural powers of a sorceress, which she did not scruple to use on Jason's behalf, and she left her native land with Jason, after having deceived her father and slain her brother that Jason might succeed in his quest. Back in the court of Pelias, the usurping king of Iolcos, where Jason held the rightful claim to the throne, Medea acted again to abet her lord. On this occasion, she contrived the death of Pelias, but Jason was unable to place himself in power. The ill-starred pair, with the two sons who had been born to them, fled in exile to Corinth. It is here that the action of our play commences, and the situation at the very opening foreshadows in intensity the remainder of the play, for Jason has deserted Medea, and has wedded the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth.

Euripides in the course of the tragedy submits his two leading characters to a penetrating psychological analysis. Jason is portrayed as a supreme egotist, who resents being under such great obligation as he is to Medea, yet who has not been unwilling to accept the benefits which have accrued to him through Medea's crimes. There may be a certain slight degree of genuineness in his defence, that he is marrying the Corinthian princess in order to consolidate not only his own position in their new home, but also that of Medea and their children. In contrast, Medea has but a single guiding passion, and that is her love for Jason. She committed every crime for Jason, because she loved him and desired to bind him closer to herself. And now that he has abandoned her, all the intensity of her love has changed violently into an intensity of hate and a desire for revenge. The means she employs are horrifying. By killing Creon

and his daughter, through her gifts of the poisoned robe and chaplet (the device which also appears in *The Trachiniae* of Sophocles), and by slaying her own children, Medea renders Jason abjectly desolate. The depth of her passion for vengeance is intensified when pathetically overwhelmed by love for her children she momentarily weakens in her resolve to kill them. Her final act therefore is presented with redoubled force.

Critics have been troubled by the dramatic function of the scene in which Aegeus appears and offers an ultimate refuge for Medea. The scene may be more integral to the play than these critics have suspected because in it the childlessness of Aegeus seems to suggest to Medea that her revenge take the form of killing her children, in order that Jason may suffer in like fashion. The playwright has also been censured because he permits Medea to escape in the dragon-chariot at the end. Perhaps an answer may lie in the fact that, horrible though Medea's acts are, still she commands a modicum of sympathy, for Jason's injustice to her has driven her to these extremes, and by allowing her to escape the poet partially justifies her deeds. Furthermore, Euripides may have been influenced by the existence of a cult of Medea's children at Corinth, and may have resolved his play so that it would accord with the traditions of the cult. Whatever may be the explanation of these supposed flaws, the play itself does display almost unrivalled psychological and emotional power. Ultimately, the abortive alliance between Jason and Medea has destroyed them both.

MEDEA

(SCENE:—*Before* MEDEA'S *house in Corinth, near the palace of* CREON. *The* NURSE *enters from the house.*)

NURSE

AH! WOULD to Heaven the good ship Argo ne'er had sped its course to the Colchian land through the misty blue Symplegades, nor ever in the glens of Pelion the pine been felled to furnish with oars the chieftain's hands, who went to fetch the golden fleece for Pelias; for then would my own mistress Medea never have sailed to the turrets of Iolcos, her soul with love for Jason smitten, nor would she have beguiled the daughters of Pelias to slay their father and come to live here in the land of Corinth with her husband and children, where her exile found favour with the citizens to whose land she had come, and in all things of her own accord was she at one with Jason, the greatest safeguard this when wife and husband do agree; but now their love is all turned to hate, and tenderest ties are weak. For Jason hath betrayed his own children and my mistress dear for the love of a royal bride, for he hath wedded the daughter of Creon, lord of this land. While Medea, his hapless wife, thus scorned, appeals to the oaths he swore, recalls the strong pledge his right hand gave, and bids heaven be witness what requital she is finding from Jason. And here she lies fasting, yielding her body to her grief, wasting away in tears ever since she learnt that she was wronged by her husband, never lifting her eye nor raising her face from off the ground; and she lends as deaf an ear to her friend's warning as if she were a rock or ocean billow, save when she turns her snow-white neck aside and softly to herself bemoans her father dear, her country and her home, which she gave up to come hither with the man who now holds her in dishonour. She, poor lady, hath by sad experience learnt how good a thing it is never to quit one's native land. And she hates her children now and feels no joy at seeing them; I fear she may contrive some untoward scheme; for her mood is dangerous nor will she brook her cruel treatment; full well I know her, and I much do dread that she will plunge the keen sword through their hearts, stealing without a word into the chamber where their marriage couch is spread, or

else that she will slay the prince and bridegroom too, and so find some calamity still more grievous than the present; for dreadful is her wrath; verily the man that doth incur her hate will have no easy task to raise o'er her a song of triumph. Lo! where her sons come hither from their childish sports; little they reck of their mother's woes, for the soul of the young is no friend to sorrow.

(*The* ATTENDANT *leads in* MEDEA'S *children.*)

ATTENDANT

Why dost thou, so long my lady's own handmaid, stand here at the gate alone, loudly lamenting to thyself the piteous tale? how comes it that Medea will have thee leave her to herself?

NURSE

Old man, attendant on the sons of Jason, our masters' fortunes when they go awry make good slaves grieve and touch their hearts. Oh! I have come to such a pitch of grief that there stole a yearning wish upon me to come forth hither and proclaim to heaven and earth my mistress's hard fate.

ATTENDANT

What! has not the poor lady ceased yet from her lamentation?

NURSE

Would I were as thou art! the mischief is but now beginning; it has not reached its climax yet.

ATTENDANT

O foolish one, if I may call my mistress such a name; how little she recks of evils yet more recent!

NURSE

What mean'st, old man? grudge not to tell me.

ATTENDANT

'Tis naught; I do repent me even of the words I have spoken.

NURSE

Nay, by thy beard I conjure thee, hide it not from thy fellow-slave; I will be silent, if need be, on that text.

ATTENDANT

I heard one say, pretending not to listen as I approached the place where our greybeards sit playing draughts near Pirene's sacred spring, that Creon, the ruler of this land, is bent on driving these children and their mother from the boundaries of Corinth; but I know not whether the news is to be relied upon, and would fain it were not.

NURSE

What! will Jason brook such treatment of his sons, even though he be at variance with their mother?

ATTENDANT

Old ties give way to new; he bears no longer any love to this family.

NURSE

Undone, it seems, are we, if to old woes fresh ones we add, ere we have drained the former to the dregs.

ATTENDANT

Hold thou thy peace, say not a word of this; 'tis no time for our mistress to learn hereof.

NURSE

O children, do ye hear how your father feels towards you? Perdition catch him, but no! he is my master still; yet is he proved a very traitor to his nearest and dearest.

ATTENDANT

And who 'mongst men is not? Art learning only now, that every single man cares for himself more than for his neighbour, some from honest motives, others for mere gain's sake? seeing that to indulge his passion their father has ceased to love these children.

NURSE

Go, children, within the house; all will be well. Do thou keep them as far away as may be, and bring them not near their mother in her evil hour. For ere this have I seen her eyeing them savagely, as though she were minded to do them some hurt, and well I know she will not cease from her fury till she have pounced on some victim. At least may she turn her hand against her foes, and not against her friends.

MEDEA (*chanting within*)

Ah, me! a wretched suffering woman I! O would that I could die!

NURSE (*chanting*)

'Tis as I said, my dear children; wild fancies stir your mother's heart, wild fury goads her on. Into the house without delay, come not near her eye, approach her not, beware her savage mood, the fell tempest of her reckless heart. In, in with what speed ye may. For 'tis plain she will soon redouble her fury; that cry is but the herald of the gathering storm-cloud whose lightning soon will flash; what will her proud restless soul, in the anguish of despair, be guilty of?

(*The* ATTENDANT *takes the children into the house.*)

MEDEA (*chanting within*)

Ah, me! the agony I have suffered, deep enough to call for these laments! Curse you and your father too, ye children damned, sons of a doomed mother! Ruin seize the whole family!

NURSE (*chanting*)

Ah me! ah me! the pity of it! Why, pray, do thy children share their father's crime? Why hatest thou them? Woe is you, poor children, how do I grieve for you lest ye suffer some outrage! Strange are the tempers of princes, and maybe because they seldom have to obey, and mostly lord it over others, change they their moods with difficulty. 'Tis better then to have been trained to live on equal terms. Be it mine to reach old age, not in proud pomp, but in security! Moderation wins the day first as a better word for men to use, and likewise it is far the best course for them to pursue; but greatness that doth o'erreach itself, brings no blessing to mortal men; but pays a penalty of greater ruin whenever fortune is wroth with a family.

(*The* CHORUS *enters. The following lines between the* NURSE, CHORUS, *and* MEDEA *are sung.*)

CHORUS

I heard the voice, uplifted loud, of our poor Colchian lady, nor yet is she quiet; speak, aged dame, for as I stood by the house with double gates I heard a voice of weeping from within, and I do grieve, lady, for the sorrows of this house, for it hath won my love.

NURSE

'Tis a house no more; all that is passed away long since; a royal bride keeps Jason at her side, while our mistress pines away in her bower, finding no comfort for her soul in aught her friends can say.

MEDEA (*within*)

Oh, oh! Would that Heaven's levin bolt would cleave this head in twain! What gain is life to me? Woe, woe is me! O, to die and win release, quitting this loathed existence!

CHORUS

Didst hear, O Zeus, thou earth, and thou, O light, the piteous note of woe the hapless wife is uttering? How shall a yearning for that insatiate resting-place ever hasten for thee, poor reckless one, the end that death alone can bring? Never pray for that. And if thy lord prefers a fresh love, be not angered with him for that; Zeus will judge 'twixt thee and him herein. Then mourn not for thy husband's loss too much, nor waste thyself away.

MEDEA (*within*)

Great Themis, and husband of Themis, behold what I am suffering now, though I did bind that accursed one, my husband, by strong oaths to me! O, to see him and his bride some day brought to utter destruction, they and their house with them, for that they presume to wrong me thus unprovoked. O my father, my country, that I have left to my shame, after slaying my own brother.

NURSE

Do ye hear her words, how loudly she adjures Themis, oft invoked, and Zeus, whom men regard as keeper of their oaths? On no mere trifle surely will our mistress spend her rage.

CHORUS

Would that she would come forth for us to see, and listen to the words of counsel we might give, if haply she might lay aside the fierce fury of her wrath, and her temper stern. Never be my zeal at any rate denied my friends! But go thou and bring her hither outside the house, and tell her this our friendly thought; haste thee ere she do some mischief to those inside the house, for this sorrow of hers is mounting high.

NURSE

This will I do; but I doubt whether I shall persuade my mistress; still willingly will I undertake this trouble for you; albeit, she glares upon her servants with the look of a lioness with cubs, whenso anyone draws nigh to speak to her. Wert thou to call the men of old time rude uncultured boors thou wouldst not err, seeing that they devised their hymns for festive occasions, for banquets, and to grace the board, a pleasure to catch the ear, shed o'er our life, but no man hath found a way to allay hated grief by music and the minstrel's varied strain, whence arise slaughters and fell strokes of fate to o'erthrow the homes of men. And yet this were surely a gain, to heal men's wounds by music's spell, but why tune they their idle song where rich banquets are spread? For of itself doth the rich banquet, set before them, afford to men delight.

CHORUS

I heard a bitter cry of lamentation! loudly, bitterly she calls on the traitor of her marriage bed, her perfidious spouse; by grievous wrongs oppressed she invokes Themis, bride of Zeus, witness of oaths, who brought her unto Hellas, the land that fronts the strand of Asia, o'er the sea by night through ocean's boundless gate.

(*As the* CHORUS *finishes its song,* MEDEA *enters from the house.*)

MEDEA

From the house I have come forth, Corinthian ladies, for fear lest you be blaming me; for well I know that amongst men many by showing pride have gotten them an ill name and a reputation for indifference, both those who shun men's gaze and those who move amid the stranger crowd, and likewise they who choose a quiet walk in life. For there is no just discernment in the eyes of men, for they, or ever they have surely learnt their neighbour's heart, loathe him at first sight, though never wronged by him; and so a stranger most of all should adopt a city's views; nor do I commend that citizen, who, in the stubbornness of his heart, from churlishness resents the city's will.

But on me hath fallen this unforeseen disaster, and sapped my life; ruined I am, and long to resign the boon of existence, kind friends, and die. For he who was all the world to me, as well thou knowest, hath turned out the worst of men, my own husband. Of all things that have life and sense we women are the most hapless creatures; first must we buy a husband at a great price, and o'er ourselves a tyrant set which is an evil worse than the first; and herein lies the most important issue, whether our choice be good or bad. For divorce is not honourable to women, nor can we disown our lords. Next must the wife, coming as she does to ways and customs new, since she hath not learnt the lesson in her home, have a diviner's eye to see how best to treat the partner of her life. If haply we perform these tasks with thoroughness and tact, and the husband live with us, without resenting the yoke, our life is a happy one; if not, 'twere best to die. But when a man is vexed with what he finds indoors, he goeth forth and rids his soul of its disgust, betaking him to some friend or comrade of like age; whilst we must needs regard his single self.

And yet they say we live secure at home, while they are at the wars, with their sorry reasoning, for I would gladly take my stand in battle array three times o'er, than once give birth. But enough! this language suits not thee as it does me; thou hast a city here, a father's house, some joy in life, and friends to share thy thoughts, but I am destitute, without a city, and therefore scorned by my husband, a captive I from a foreign shore, with no mother, brother, or kinsman in whom to find a new haven of refuge from this calamity. Wherefore this one boon and only this I wish to win from thee,—thy silence, if haply I can some way or means devise to avenge me on my husband for this cruel treatment, and on the man who gave to him his daughter, and on her who is his wife. For though a woman be timorous enough in all else, and as regards courage, a coward at the mere sight of steel, yet in the moment she finds her honour wronged, no heart is filled with deadlier thoughts than hers.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This will I do; for thou wilt be taking a just vengeance on thy husband, Medea. That thou shouldst mourn thy lot surprises me not. But lo! I see Creon, king of this land coming hither, to announce some new resolve.

(CREON *enters, with his retinue.*)

CREON

Hark thee, Medea, I bid thee take those sullen looks and angry thoughts against thy husband forth from this land in exile, and with thee take both thy children and that without delay, for I am judge in this sentence, and I will not return unto my house till I banish thee beyond the borders of the land.

MEDEA

Ah, me! now is utter destruction come upon me, unhappy that I am! For my enemies are bearing down on me full sail, nor have I any landing-place to come at in my trouble. Yet for all my wretched plight I will ask thee, Creon, wherefore dost thou drive me from the land?

CREON

I fear thee,—no longer need I veil my dread 'neath words,—lest thou devise against my child some cureless ill. Many things contribute to this fear of mine; thou art a witch by nature, expert in countless sorceries, and thou art chafing for the loss of thy husband's affection. I hear, too, so they tell me, that thou dost threaten the father of the bride, her husband, and herself with some mischief; wherefore I will take precautions ere our troubles come. For 'tis better for me to incur thy hatred now, lady, than to soften my heart and bitterly repent it hereafter.

MEDEA

Alas! this is not now the first time, but oft before, O Creon, hath my reputation injured me and caused sore mischief. Wherefore whoso is wise in his generation ought never to have his children taught to be too clever; for besides the reputation they get for idleness, they purchase bitter odium from the citizens. For if thou shouldst import new learning amongst dullards, thou wilt be thought a useless trifler, void of knowledge; while if thy fame in the city o'ertops that of the pretenders to cunning knowledge, thou wilt win their dislike. I too myself share in this ill-luck. Some think me clever and hate me, others say I am too reserved, and some the very reverse; others find me hard to please and not so very clever after all. Be that as it may, thou dost fear me lest I bring on thee something to mar thy harmony. Fear me not, Creon, my position scarce is such that I should seek to quarrel with princes. Why should I, for how hast thou injured me? Thou hast betrothed thy daughter where thy fancy prompted thee. No, 'tis my husband I hate, though I doubt not thou hast acted

wisely herein. And now I grudge not thy prosperity; betroth thy child, good luck to thee, but let me abide in this land, for though I have been wronged I will be still and yield to my superiors.

CREON

Thy words are soft to hear, but much I dread lest thou art devising some mischief in thy heart, and less than ever do I trust thee now; for a cunning woman, and man likewise, is easier to guard against when quick-tempered than when taciturn. Nay, begone at once! speak me no speeches, for this is decreed, nor hast thou any art whereby thou shalt abide amongst us, since thou hatest me.

MEDEA

O, say not so! by thy knees and by thy daughter newly-wed, I do implore!

CREON

Thou wastest words; thou wilt never persuade me.

MEDEA

What, wilt thou banish me, and to my prayers no pity yield?

CREON

I will, for I love not thee above my own family.

MEDEA

O my country! what fond memories I have of thee in this hour!

CREON

Yea, for I myself love my city best of all things save my children.

MEDEA

Ah me! ah me! to mortal man how dread a scourge is love!

CREON

That, I deem, is according to the turn our fortunes take.

MEDEA

O Zeus! let not the author of these my troubles escape thee.

CREON

Begone, thou silly woman, and free me from my toil.

MEDEA

The toil is mine, no lack of it.

CREON

Soon wilt thou be thrust out forcibly by the hand of servants.

MEDEA

Not that, not that, I do entreat thee, Creon!

CREON

Thou wilt cause disturbance yet, it seems.

MEDEA

I will begone; I ask thee not this boon to grant.

CREON

Why then this violence? why dost thou not depart?

MEDEA

Suffer me to abide this single day and devise some plan for the manner of my exile, and means of living for my children, since their father cares not to provide his babes therewith. Then pity them; thou too hast children of thine own; thou needs must have a kindly heart. For my own lot I care naught, though I an exile am, but for those babes I weep, that they should learn what sorrow means.

CREON

Mine is a nature anything but harsh; full oft by showing pity have I suffered shipwreck; and now albeit I clearly see my error, yet shalt thou gain this request, lady; but I do forewarn thee, if to-morrow's rising sun shall find thee and thy children within the borders of this land, thou diest; my word is spoken and it will not lie. So now, if abide thou must, stay this one day only, for in it thou canst not do any of the fearful deeds I dread.

(CREON *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Ah! poor lady, woe is thee! Alas, for thy sorrows! Whither wilt thou turn? What protection, what home or country to save thee from thy troubles wilt thou find? O Medea, in what a hopeless sea of misery heaven hath plunged thee!

MEDEA

On all sides sorrow pens me in. Who shall gainsay this? But all is not yet lost! think not so. Still are there troubles in store for the new bride, and for her bridegroom no light toil. Dost think I would ever have fawned on yonder man, unless to gain some end or form some scheme? Nay, I would not so much as have spoken to him or touched him with my hand. But he has in folly so far stepped in that, though he might have checked my plot by banishing me from the land, he hath allowed me to abide this day, in which I will lay low in death three of my enemies—a father and his daughter and my husband too. Now, though I have many ways to compass their death, I am not sure, friends, which I am to try first. Shall I set

fire to the bridal mansion, or plunge the whetted sword through their hearts, softly stealing into the chamber where their couch is spread? One thing stands in my way. If I am caught making my way into the chamber, intent on my design, I shall be put to death and cause my foes to mock. 'Twere best to take the shortest way—the way we women are most skilled in—by poison to destroy them. Well, suppose them dead; what city will receive me? What friendly host will give me a shelter in his land, a home secure, and save my soul alive? None. So I will wait yet a little while in case some tower of defence rise up for me; then will I proceed to this bloody deed in crafty silence; but if some unexpected mischance drive me forth, I will with mine own hand seize the sword, e'en though I die for it, and slay them, and go forth on my bold path of daring. By that dread queen whom I revere before all others and have chosen to share my task, by Hecate who dwells within my inmost chamber, not one of them shall wound my heart and rue it not. Bitter and sad will I make their marriage for them; bitter shall be the wooing of it, bitter my exile from the land. Up, then, Medea, spare not the secrets of thy art in plotting and devising; on to the danger. Now comes a struggle needing courage. Dost see what thou art suffering? 'Tis not for thee to be a laughing-stock to the race of Sisyphus by reason of this wedding of Jason, sprung, as thou art, from a noble sire, and of the Sun-god's race. Thou hast cunning; and, more than this, we women, though by nature little apt for virtuous deeds, are most expert to fashion any mischief.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Back to their source the holy rivers turn their tide. Order and the universe are being reversed. 'Tis men whose counsels are treacherous, whose oath by heaven is no longer sure. Rumour shall bring a change o'er my life, bringing it into good repute. Honour's dawn is breaking for woman's sex; no more shall the foul tongue of slander fix upon us.

antistrophe 1

The songs of the poets of old shall cease to make our faithlessness their theme. Phoebus, lord of minstrelsy, hath not implanted in our mind the gift of heavenly song, else had I sung an answering strain to the race of males, for time's long chapter affords many a theme on their sex as well as ours.

strophe 2

With mind distraught didst thou thy father's house desert on thy voyage betwixt ocean's twin rocks, and on a foreign strand thou

dwellest, thy bed left husbandless, poor lady, and thou an exile from the land, dishonoured, persecuted.

antistrophe 2

Gone is the grace that oaths once had. Through all the breadth of Hellas honour is found no more; to heaven hath it sped away. For thee no father's house is open, woe is thee! to be a haven from the troublous storm, while o'er thy home is set another queen, the bride that is preferred to thee.

(*As the* CHORUS *finishes its song,* JASON *enters, alone.* MEDEA *comes out of the house.*)

JASON

It is not now I first remark, but oft ere this, how unruly a pest is a harsh temper. For instance, thou, hadst thou but patiently endured the will of thy superiors, mightest have remained here in this land and house, but now for thy idle words wilt thou be banished. Thy words are naught to me. Cease not to call Jason basest of men; but for those words thou hast spoken against our rulers, count it all gain that exile is thy only punishment. I ever tried to check the outbursts of the angry monarch, and would have had thee stay, but thou wouldst not forego thy silly rage, always reviling our rulers, and so thou wilt be banished. Yet even after all this I weary not of my goodwill, but am come with thus much forethought, lady, that thou mayst not be destitute nor want for aught, when, with thy sons, thou art cast out. Many an evil doth exile bring in its train with it; for even though thou hatest me, never will I harbour hard thoughts of thee.

MEDEA

Thou craven villain (for that is the only name my tongue can find for thee, a foul reproach on thy unmanliness), comest thou to me, thou, most hated foe of gods, of me, and of all mankind? 'Tis no proof of courage or hardihood to confront thy friends after injuring them, but that worst of all human diseases—loss of shame. Yet hast thou done well to come; for I shall ease my soul by reviling thee, and thou wilt be vexed at my recital. I will begin at the very beginning. I saved thy life, as every Hellene knows who sailed with thee aboard the good ship Argo, when thou wert sent to tame and yoke fire-breathing bulls, and to sow the deadly tilth. Yea, and I slew the dragon which guarded the golden fleece, keeping sleepless watch o'er it with many a wreathed coil, and I raised for thee a beacon of deliverance. Father and home of my free will I left and came with thee to Iolcos, 'neath Pelion's hills, for my love was stronger than my prudence. Next I caused the death of Pelias by a doom most grievous, even by his

own children's hand, beguiling them of all their fear. All this have I done for thee, thou traitor! and thou hast cast me over, taking to thyself another wife, though children have been born to us. Hadst thou been childless still, I could have pardoned thy desire for this new union. Gone is now the trust I put in oaths. I cannot even understand whether thou thinkest that the gods of old no longer rule, or that fresh decrees are now in vogue amongst mankind, for thy conscience must tell thee thou hast not kept faith with me. Ah! poor right hand, which thou didst often grasp. These knees thou didst embrace! All in vain, I suffered a traitor to touch me! How short of my hopes I am fallen! But come, I will deal with thee as though thou wert my friend. Yet what kindness can I expect from one so base as thee? But yet I will do it, for my questioning will show thee yet more base. Whither can I turn me now? to my father's house, to my own country, which I for thee deserted to come hither? to the hapless daughters of Pelias? A glad welcome, I trow, would they give me in their home, whose father's death I compassed! My case stands even thus: I am become the bitter foe to those of mine own home, and those whom I need ne'er have wronged I have made mine enemies to pleasure thee. Wherefore to reward me for this thou hast made me doubly blest in the eyes of many a wife in Hellas; and in thee I own a peerless, trusty lord. O woe is me, if indeed I am to be cast forth an exile from the land, without one friend; one lone woman with her babes forlorn! Yea, a fine reproach to thee in thy bridal hour, that thy children and the wife who saved thy life are beggars and vagabonds! O Zeus! why hast thou granted unto man clear signs to know the sham in gold, while on man's brow no brand is stamped whereby to gauge the villain's heart?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There is a something terrible and past all cure, when quarrels arise 'twixt those who are near and dear.

JASON

Needs must I now, it seems, turn orator, and, like a good helmsman on a ship with close-reefed sails, weather that wearisome tongue of thine. Now, I believe, since thou wilt exaggerate thy favours, that to Cypris alone of gods or men I owe the safety of my voyage. Thou hast a subtle wit enough; yet were it a hateful thing for me to say that the Love-god constrained thee by his resistless shaft to save my life. However, I will not reckon this too nicely; 'twas kindly done, however thou didst serve me. Yet for my safety hast thou received more than ever thou gavest, as I will show. First, thou dwellest in Hellas, instead of thy barbarian land, and hast learnt what justice means and how to live by law, not by the dictates of brute force; and all the Hellenes recognize thy cleverness, and thou hast gained a name; whereas, if thou hadst dwelt upon the confines

of the earth, no tongue had mentioned thee. Give me no gold within my halls, nor skill to sing a fairer strain than ever Orpheus sang, unless therewith my fame be spread abroad! So much I say to thee about my own toils, for 'twas thou didst challenge me to this retort. As for the taunts thou urgest against my marriage with the princess, I will prove to thee, first, that I am prudent herein, next chastened in my love, and last a powerful friend to thee and to thy sons; only hold thy peace. Since I have here withdrawn from Iolcos with many a hopeless trouble at my back, what happier device could I, an exile, frame than marriage with the daughter of the king? 'Tis not because I loathe thee for my wife—the thought that rankles in thy heart; 'tis not because I am smitten with desire for a new bride, nor yet that I am eager to vie with others in begetting many children, for those we have are quite enough, and I do not complain. Nay, 'tis that we—and this is most important—may dwell in comfort, instead of suffering want (for well I know that every whilom friend avoids the poor), and that I might rear my sons as doth befit my house; further, that I might be the father of brothers for the children thou hast borne, and raise these to the same high rank, uniting the family in one,—to my lasting bliss. Thou, indeed, hast no need of more children, but me it profits to help my present family by that which is to be. Have I miscarried here? Not even thou wouldest say so unless a rival's charms rankled in thy bosom. No, but you women have such strange ideas, that you think all is well so long as your married life runs smooth; but if some mischance occur to ruffle your love, all that was good and lovely erst you reckon as your foes. Yea, men should have begotten children from some other source, no female race existing; thus would no evil ever have fallen on mankind.

LEADER

This speech, O Jason, hast thou with specious art arranged; but yet I think—albeit in speaking I am indiscreet—that thou hast sinned in thy betrayal of thy wife.

MEDEA

No doubt I differ from the mass of men on many points; for, to my mind, whoso hath skill to fence with words in an unjust cause, incurs the heaviest penalty; for such an one, confident that he can cast a decent veil of words o'er his injustice, dares to practise it; and yet he is not so very clever after all. So do not thou put forth thy specious pleas and clever words to me now, for one word of mine will lay thee low. Hadst thou not had a villain's heart, thou shouldst have gained my consent, then made this match, instead of hiding it from those who loved thee.

JASON

Thou wouldest have lent me ready aid, no doubt, in this proposal, if I had told thee of my marriage, seeing that not even now canst thou restrain thy soul's hot fury.

MEDEA

This was not what restrained thee; but thine eye was turned towards old age, and a foreign wife began to appear a shame to thee.

JASON

Be well assured of this: 'twas not for the woman's sake I wedded the king's daughter, my present wife; but, as I have already told thee, I wished to insure thy safety and to be the father of royal sons bound by blood to my own children—a bulwark to our house.

MEDEA

May that prosperity, whose end is woe, ne'er be mine, nor such wealth as would ever sting my heart!

JASON

Change that prayer as I will teach thee, and thou wilt show more wisdom. Never let happiness appear in sorrow's guise, nor, when thy fortune smiles, pretend she frowns!

MEDEA

Mock on; thou hast a place of refuge; I am alone, an exile soon to be.

JASON

Thy own free choice was this; blame no one else.

MEDEA

What did I do? Marry, then betray thee?

JASON

Against the king thou didst invoke an impious curse.

MEDEA

On thy house too maybe I bring the curse.

JASON

Know this, I will no further dispute this point with thee. But, if thou wilt of my fortune somewhat take for the children or thyself to help thy exile, say on; for I am ready to grant it with ungrudging hand, yea and to send tokens to my friends elsewhere who shall treat thee well. If thou refuse this offer, thou wilt do a foolish deed, but if thou cease from anger the greater will be thy gain.

MEDEA

I will have naught to do with friends of thine, naught will I receive of thee, offer it not to me; a villain's gifts can bring no blessing.

JASON

At least I call the gods to witness, that I am ready in all things to serve thee and thy children, but thou dost scorn my favours and thrustest thy friends stubbornly away; wherefore thy lot will be more bitter still.

MEDEA

Away! By love for thy young bride entrapped, too long thou lingerest outside her chamber; go wed, for, if God will, thou shalt have such a marriage as thou wouldst fain refuse.

(JASON *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

When in excess and past all limits Love doth come, he brings not glory or repute to man; but if the Cyprian queen in moderate might approach, no goddess is so full of charm as she. Never, O never, lady mine, discharge at me from thy golden bow a shaft invincible, in passion's venom dipped.

antistrophe 1

On me may chastity,[1] heaven's fairest gift, look with a favouring eye; never may Cypris, goddess dread, fasten on me a temper to dispute, or restless jealousy, smiting my soul with mad desire for unlawful love, but may she hallow peaceful married life and shrewdly decide whom each of us shall wed.

strophe 2

O my country, O my own dear home! God grant I may never be an outcast from my city, leading that cruel helpless life, whose every day is misery. Ere that may I this life complete and yield to death, ay, death; for there is no misery that doth surpass the loss of fatherland.

antistrophe 2

I have seen with mine eyes, nor from the lips of others have I the lesson learnt; no city, not one friend doth pity thee in this thine awful woe. May he perish and find no favour, whoso hath not in him honour for his friends, freely unlocking his heart to them. Never shall he be friend of mine.

(MEDEA *has been seated in despair on her door-step during the choral song.* AEGEUS *and his attendants enter.*)

AEGEUS

All hail, Medea! no man knoweth fairer prelude to the greeting of friends than this.

MEDEA

All hail to thee likewise, Aegeus, son of wise Pandion. Whence comest thou to this land?

AEGEUS

From Phoebus' ancient oracle.

MEDEA

What took thee on thy travels to the prophetic centre of the earth?

AEGEUS

The wish to ask how I might raise up seed unto myself.

MEDEA

Pray tell me, hast thou till now dragged on a childless life?

AEGEUS

I have no child owing to the visitation of some god.

MEDEA

Hast thou a wife, or hast thou never known the married state?

AEGEUS

I have a wife joined to me in wedlock's bond.

MEDEA

What said Phoebus to thee as to children?

AEGEUS

Words too subtle for man to comprehend.

MEDEA

Surely I may learn the god's answer?

AEGEUS

Most assuredly, for it is just thy subtle wit it needs.

MEDEA

What said the god? speak, if I may hear it.

AEGEUS

He bade me "not loose the wineskin's pendent neck."

MEDEA

Till when? what must thou do first, what country visit?

AEGEUS
Till I to my native home return.

MEDEA
What object hast thou in sailing to this land?

AEGEUS
O'er Troezen's realm is Pittheus king.

MEDEA
Pelops' son, a man devout they say.

AEGEUS
To him I fain would impart the oracle of the god.

MEDEA
The man is shrewd and versed in such-like lore.

AEGEUS
Aye, and to me the dearest of all my warrior friends.

MEDEA
Good luck to thee! success to all thy wishes!

AEGEUS
But why that downcast eye, that wasted cheek?

MEDEA
O Aegeus, my husband has proved most evil.

AEGEUS
What meanest thou? explain to me clearly the cause of thy despondency.

MEDEA
Jason is wronging me though I have given him no cause.

AEGEUS
What hath he done? tell me more clearly.

MEDEA
He is taking another wife to succeed me as mistress of his house.

AEGEUS
Can he have brought himself to such a dastard deed?

MEDEA
Be assured thereof; I, whom he loved of yore, am in dishonour now.

AEGEUS

Hath he found a new love? or does he loathe thy bed?

MEDEA

Much in love is he! A traitor to his friend is he become.

AEGEUS

Enough! if he is a villain as thou sayest.

MEDEA

The alliance he is so much enamoured of is with a princess.

AEGEUS

Who gives his daughter to him? go on, I pray.

MEDEA

Creon, who is lord of this land of Corinth.

AEGEUS

Lady, I can well pardon thy grief.

MEDEA

I am undone, and more than that, am banished from the land.

AEGEUS

By whom? fresh woe this word of thine unfolds.

MEDEA

Creon drives me forth in exile from Corinth.

AEGEUS

Doth Jason allow it? This too I blame him for.

MEDEA

Not in words, but he will not stand out against it. O, I implore thee by this beard and by thy knees, in suppliant posture, pity, O pity my sorrows; do not see me cast forth forlorn, but receive me in thy country, to a seat within thy halls. So may thy wish by heaven's grace be crowned with a full harvest of offspring, and may thy life close in happiness! Thou knowest not the rare good luck thou findest here, for I will make thy childlessness to cease and cause thee to beget fair issue; so potent are the spells I know.

AEGEUS

Lady, on many grounds I am most fain to grant thee this thy boon, first for the gods' sake, next for the children whom thou dost promise I shall beget; for in respect of this I am completely lost. 'Tis thus with me; if

e'er thou reach my land, I will attempt to champion thee as I am bound to do. Only one warning I do give thee first, lady; I will not from this land bear thee away, yet if of thyself thou reach my halls, there shalt thou bide in safety and I will never yield thee up to any man. But from this land escape without my aid, for I have no wish to incur the blame of my allies as well.

MEDEA

It shall be even so; but wouldst thou pledge thy word to this, I should in all be well content with thee.

AEGEUS

Surely thou dost trust me? or is there aught that troubles thee?

MEDEA

Thee I trust; but Pelias' house and Creon are my foes. Wherefore, if thou art bound by an oath, thou wilt not give me up to them when they come to drag me from the land, but, having entered into a compact and sworn by heaven as well, thou wilt become my friend and disregard their overtures. Weak is any aid of mine, whilst they have wealth and a princely house.

AEGEUS

Lady, thy words show much foresight, so if this is thy will, I do not refuse. For I shall feel secure and safe if I have some pretext to offer to thy foes, and thy case too the firmer stands. Now name thy gods.

MEDEA

Swear by the plain of Earth, by Helios my father's sire, and, in one comprehensive oath, by all the race of gods.

AEGEUS

What shall I swear to do, from what refrain? tell me that.

MEDEA

Swear that thou wilt never of thyself expel me from thy land, nor, whilst life is thine, permit any other, one of my foes maybe, to hale me thence if so he will.

AEGEUS

By Earth I swear, by the Sun-god's holy beam and by all the host of heaven that I will stand fast to the terms I hear thee make.

MEDEA

'Tis enough. If thou shouldst break this oath, what curse dost thou invoke upon thyself?

AEGEUS

Whate'er betides the impious.

MEDEA

Go in peace; all is well, and I with what speed I may, will to thy city come, when I have wrought my purpose and obtained my wish.

(AEGEUS *and his retinue depart.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

May Maia's princely son go with thee on thy way to bring thee to thy home, and mayest thou attain that on which thy soul is set so firmly, for to my mind thou seemest a generous man, O Aegeus.

MEDEA

O Zeus, and Justice, child of Zeus, and Sun-god's light, now will I triumph o'er my foes, kind friends; on victory's road have I set forth; good hope have I of wreaking vengeance on those I hate. For where we were in most distress this stranger hath appeared, to be a haven in my counsels; to him will we make fast the cables of our ship when we come to the town and citadel of Pallas. But now will I explain to thee my plans in full; do not expect to hear a pleasant tale. A servant of mine will I to Jason send and crave an interview; then when he comes I will address him with soft words, say, "this pleases me," and, "that is well," even the marriage with the princess, which my treacherous lord is celebrating, and add "it suits us both, 'twas well thought out"; then will I entreat that here my children may abide, not that I mean to leave them in a hostile land for foes to flout, but that I may slay the king's daughter by guile. For I will send them with gifts in their hands, carrying them unto the bride to save them from banishment, a robe of finest woof and a chaplet of gold. And if these ornaments she take and put them on, miserably shall she die, and likewise everyone who touches her; with such fell poisons will I smear my gifts. And here I quit this theme; but I shudder at the deed I must do next; for I will slay the children I have borne; there is none shall take them from my toils; and when I have utterly confounded Jason's house I will leave the land, escaping punishment for my dear children's murder, after my most unholy deed. For I cannot endure the taunts of enemies, kind friends; enough! what gain is life to me? I have no country, home, or refuge left. O, I did wrong, that hour I left my father's home, persuaded by that Hellene's words, who now shall pay the penalty, so help me God. Never shall he see again alive the children I bore to him, nor from his new bride shall he beget issue, for she must die a hideous death, slain by my drugs. Let no one deem me a poor weak woman who sits with folded hands, but of another mould, dangerous to foes and well-disposed to friends; for they win the fairest fame who live their life like me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Since thou hast imparted this design to me, I bid thee hold thy hand, both from a wish to serve thee and because I would uphold the laws men make.

MEDEA

It cannot but be so; thy words I pardon since thou art not in the same sorry plight that I am.

LEADER

O lady, wilt thou steel thyself to slay thy children twain?

MEDEA

I will, for that will stab my husband to the heart.

LEADER

It may, but thou wilt be the saddest wife alive.

MEDEA

No matter; wasted is every word that comes 'twixt now and then. Ho! (*The* NURSE *enters in answer to her call.*) Thou, go call me Jason hither, for thee I do employ on every mission of trust. No word divulge of all my purpose, as thou art to thy mistress loyal and likewise of my sex. (*The* NURSE *goes out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)[2]

strophe 1

Sons of Erechtheus, heroes happy from of yore, children of the blessed gods, fed on wisdom's glorious food in a holy land ne'er pillaged by its foes, ye who move with sprightly step through a climate ever bright and clear, where, as legend tells, the Muses nine, Pieria's holy maids, were brought to birth by Harmonia with the golden hair.

antistrophe 1

And poets sing how Cypris drawing water from the streams of fair-flowing Cephissus breathes o'er the land a gentle breeze of balmy winds, and ever as she crowns her tresses with a garland of sweet rose-buds sends forth the Loves to sit by wisdom's side, to take a part in every excellence.

strophe 2

How then shall the city of sacred streams, the land that welcomes those it loves, receive thee, the murderess of thy children, thee whose presence with others is a pollution? Think on the murder of thy children, consider the bloody deed thou takest on thee. Nay, by thy knees we, one and all, implore thee, slay not thy babes.

antistrophe 2

Where shall hand or heart find hardihood enough in wreaking such a fearsome deed upon thy sons? How wilt thou look upon thy babes, and still without a tear retain thy bloody purpose? Thou canst not, when they fall at thy feet for mercy, steel thy heart and dip in their blood thy hand.

(JASON *enters.*)

JASON

I am come at thy bidding, for e'en though thy hate for me is bitter thou shalt not fail in this small boon, but I will hear what new request thou hast to make of me, lady.

MEDEA

Jason, I crave thy pardon for the words I spoke, and well thou mayest brook my burst of passion, for ere now we twain have shared much love. For I have reasoned with my soul and railed upon me thus, "Ah! poor heart! why am I thus distraught, why so angered 'gainst all good advice, why have I come to hate the rulers of the land, my husband too, who does the best for me he can, in wedding with a princess and rearing for my children noble brothers? Shall I not cease to fret? What possesses me, when heaven its best doth offer? Have I not my children to consider? do I forget that we are fugitives, in need of friends?" When I had thought all this I saw how foolish I had been, how senselessly enraged. So now I do commend thee and think thee most wise in forming this connection for us; but I was mad, I who should have shared in these designs, helped on thy plans, and lent my aid to bring about the match, only too pleased to wait upon thy bride. But what we are, we are, we women, evil I will not say; wherefore thou shouldst not sink to our sorry level nor with our weapons meet our childishness.

I yield and do confess that I was wrong then, but now have I come to a better mind. Come hither, my children, come, leave the house, step forth, and with me greet and bid farewell to your father, be reconciled from all past bitterness unto your friends, as now your mother is; for we have made a truce and anger is no more.

(*The* ATTENDANT *comes out of the house with the children.*)

Take his right hand; ah me! my sad fate! when I reflect, as now, upon the hidden future. O my children, since there awaits you even thus a long, long life, stretch forth the hand to take a fond farewell. Ah me! how new to tears am I, how full of fear! For now that I have at last released me from my quarrel with your father, I let the tear-drops stream adown my tender cheek.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

From my eyes too bursts forth the copious tear; O, may no greater ill than the present e'er befall!

JASON

Lady, I praise this conduct, not that I blame what is past; for it is but natural to the female sex to vent their spleen against a husband when he trafficks in other marriages besides his own. But thy heart is changed to wiser schemes and thou art determined on the better course, late though it be; this is acting like a woman of sober sense. And for you, my sons, hath your father provided with all good heed a sure refuge, by God's grace; for ye, I trow, shall with your brothers share hereafter the foremost rank in this Corinthian realm. Only grow up, for all the rest your sire and whoso of the gods is kind to us is bringing to pass. May I see you reach man's full estate, high o'er the heads of those I hate! But thou, lady, why with fresh tears dost thou thine eyelids wet, turning away thy wan cheek, with no welcome for these my happy tidings?

MEDEA

'Tis naught; upon these children my thoughts were turned.

JASON

Then take heart; for I will see that it is well with them.

MEDEA

I will do so; nor will I doubt thy word; woman is a weak creature, ever given to tears.

JASON

Why prithee, unhappy one, dost moan o'er these children?

MEDEA

I gave them birth; and when thou didst pray long life for them, pity entered into my soul to think that these things must be. But the reason of thy coming hither to speak with me is partly told, the rest will I now mention. Since it is the pleasure of the rulers of the land to banish me, and well I know 'twere best for me to stand not in the way of thee or of the rulers by dwelling here, enemy as I am thought unto their house, forth from this land in exile am I going, but these children,—that they may know thy fostering hand, beg Creon to remit their banishment.

JASON

I doubt whether I can persuade him, yet must I attempt it.

MEDEA

At least do thou bid thy wife ask her sire this boon, to remit the exile of the children from this land.

JASON

Yea, that will I; and her methinks I shall persuade, since she is a woman like the rest.

MEDEA

I too will aid thee in this task, for by the children's hand I will send to her gifts that far surpass in beauty, I well know, aught that now is seen 'mongst men, a robe of finest tissue and a chaplet of chased gold. But one of my attendants must haste and bring the ornaments hither. (*A servant goes into the house.*) Happy shall she be not once alone but ten thousandfold, for in thee she wins the noblest soul to share her love, and gets these gifts as well which on a day my father's sire, the Sun-god, bestowed on his descendants. (*The servant returns and hands the gifts to the children.*) My children, take in your hands these wedding gifts, and bear them as an offering to the royal maid, the happy bride; for verily the gifts she shall receive are not to be scorned.

JASON

But why so rashly rob thyself of these gifts? Dost think a royal palace wants for robes or gold? Keep them, nor give them to another. For well I know that if my lady hold me in esteem, she will set my price above all wealth.

MEDEA

Say not so; 'tis said that gifts tempt even gods; and o'er men's minds gold holds more potent sway than countless words. Fortune smiles upon thy bride, and heaven now doth swell her triumph; youth is hers and princely power; yet to save my children from exile I would barter life, not dross alone. Children, when we are come to the rich palace, pray your father's new bride, my mistress, with suppliant voice to save you from exile, offering her these ornaments the while; for it is most needful that she receive the gifts in her own hand. Now go and linger not; may ye succeed and to your mother bring back the glad tidings she fain would hear!

(JASON, *the* ATTENDANT, *and the children go out together.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Gone, gone is every hope I had that the children yet might live; forth to their doom they now proceed. The hapless bride will take, ay, take the golden crown that is to be her ruin; with her own hand will she lift and place upon her golden locks the garniture of death.

antistrophe 1

Its grace and sheen divine will tempt her to put on the robe and crown of gold, and in that act will she deck herself to be a bride amid the dead. Such is the snare whereinto she will fall, such is the deadly doom that waits the hapless maid, nor shall she from the curse escape.

strophe 2

And thou, poor wretch, who to thy sorrow art wedding a king's daughter, little thinkest of the doom thou art bringing on thy children's life, or of the cruel death that waits thy bride. Woe is thee! how art thou fallen from thy high estate!

antistrophe 2

Next do I bewail thy sorrows, O mother hapless in thy children, thou who wilt slay thy babes because thou hast a rival, the babes thy husband hath deserted impiously to join him to another bride.

(*The* ATTENDANT *enters with the children.*)

ATTENDANT

Thy children, lady, are from exile freed, and gladly did the royal bride accept thy gifts in her own hands, and so thy children made their peace with her.

MEDEA

Ah!

ATTENDANT

Why art so disquieted in thy prosperous hour? Why turnest thou thy cheek away, and hast no welcome for my glad news?

MEDEA

Ah me!

ATTENDANT

These groans but ill accord with the news I bring.

MEDEA

Ah me! once more I say.

ATTENDANT

Have I unwittingly announced some evil tidings? Have I erred in thinking my news was good?

MEDEA

Thy news is as it is; I blame thee not.

ATTENDANT

Then why this downcast eye, these floods of tears?

MEDEA

Old friend, needs must I weep; for the gods and I with fell intent devised these schemes.

ATTENDANT

Be of good cheer; thou too of a surety shalt by thy sons yet be brought home again.

MEDEA

Ere that shall I bring others to their home, ah! woe is me!

ATTENDANT

Thou art not the only mother from thy children reft. Bear patiently thy troubles as a mortal must.

MEDEA

I will obey; go thou within the house and make the day's provision for the children. (*The* ATTENDANT *enters the house.* MEDEA *turns to the children.*) O my babes, my babes, ye have still a city and a home, where far from me and my sad lot you will live your lives, reft of your mother for ever; while I must to another land in banishment, or ever I have had my joy of you, or lived to see you happy, or ever I have graced your marriage couch, your bride, your bridal bower, or lifted high the wedding torch. Ah me! a victim of my own self-will. So it was all in vain I reared you, O my sons; in vain did suffer, racked with anguish, enduring the cruel pangs of childbirth. 'Fore Heaven I once had hope, poor me! high hope of ye that you would nurse me in my age and deck my corpse with loving hands, a boon we mortals covet; but now is my sweet fancy dead and gone; for I must lose you both and in bitterness and sorrow drag through life. And ye shall never with fond eyes see your mother more, for o'er your life there comes a change. Ah me! ah me! why do ye look at me so, my children? why smile that last sweet smile? Ah me! what am I to do? My heart gives way when I behold my children's laughing eyes. O, I cannot; farewell to all my former schemes; I will take the children from the land, the babes I bore. Why should I wound their sire by wounding them, and get me a twofold measure of sorrow? No, no, I will not do it. Farewell my scheming! And yet what possesses me? Can I consent to let those foes of mine escape from punishment, and incur their mockery? I must face this deed. Out upon my craven heart! to think that I should even have let the soft words escape my soul. Into the house, children! (*The children go into the house.*) And whoso feels he must not be present at my sacrifice, must see to it himself; I will not spoil my handiwork. Ah!

ah! do not, my heart, O do not do this deed! Let the children go, unhappy one, spare the babes! For if they live, they will cheer thee in our exile there. Nay, by the fiends of hell's abyss, never, never will I hand my children over to their foes to mock and flout. Die they must in any case, and since 'tis so, why I, the mother who bore them, will give the fatal blow. In any case their doom is fixed and there is no escape. Already the crown is on her head, the robe is round her, and she is dying, the royal bride; that do I know full well. But now since I have a piteous path to tread, and yet more piteous still the path I send my children on, fain would I say farewell to them. (*The children come out at her call. She takes them in her arms.*) O my babes, my babes, let your mother kiss your hands. Ah! hands I love so well, O lips most dear to me! O noble form and features of my children, I wish ye joy, but in that other land, for here your father robs you of your home. O the sweet embrace, the soft young cheek, the fragrant breath! my children! Go, leave me; I cannot bear to longer look upon ye; my sorrow wins the day. At last I understand the awful deed I am to do; but passion, that cause of direst woes to mortal man, hath triumphed o'er my sober thoughts.

(*She goes into the house with the children.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Oft ere now have I pursued subtler themes and have faced graver issues than woman's sex should seek to probe; but then e'en we aspire to culture, which dwells with us to teach us wisdom; I say not all; for small is the class amongst women—(one maybe shalt thou find 'mid many)—that is not incapable of wisdom. And amongst mortals I do assert that they who are wholly without experience and have never had children far surpass in happiness those who are parents. The childless, because they have never proved whether children grow up to be a blessing or curse to men are removed from all share in many troubles; whilst those who have a sweet race of children growing up in their houses do wear away, as I perceive, their whole life through; first with the thought how they may train them up in virtue, next how they shall leave their sons the means to live; and after all this 'tis far from clear whether on good or bad children they bestow their toil. But one last crowning woe for every mortal man I now will name; suppose that they have found sufficient means to live, and seen their children grow to man's estate and walk in virtue's path, still if fortune so befall, comes Death and bears the children's bodies off to Hades. Can it be any profit to the gods to heap upon us mortal men beside our other woes this further grief for children lost, a grief surpassing all?

(MEDEA *comes out of the house.*)

MEDEA

Kind friends, long have I waited expectantly to know how things would at the palace chance. And lo! I see one of Jason's servants coming hither, whose hurried gasps for breath proclaim him the bearer of some fresh tidings.

(*A* MESSENGER *rushes in.*)

MESSENGER

Fly, fly, Medea! who hast wrought an awful deed, transgressing every law; nor leave behind or sea-borne bark or car that scours the plain.

MEDEA

Why, what hath chanced that calls for such a flight of mine?

MESSENGER

The princess is dead, a moment gone, and Creon too, her sire, slain by those drugs of thine.

MEDEA

Tidings most fair are thine! Henceforth shalt thou be ranked amongst my friends and benefactors.

MESSENGER

Ha! What? Art sane? Art not distraught, lady, who hearest with joy the outrage to our royal house done, and art not at the horrid tale afraid?

MEDEA

Somewhat have I, too, to say in answer to thy words. Be not so hasty, friend, but tell the manner of their death, for thou wouldst give me double joy, if so they perished miserably.

MESSENGER

When the children twain whom thou didst bear came with their father and entered the palace of the bride, right glad were we thralls who had shared thy griefs, for instantly from ear to ear a rumour spread that thou and thy lord had made up your former quarrel. One kissed thy children's hands, another their golden hair, while I for very joy went with them in person to the women's chambers. Our mistress, whom now we do revere in thy room, cast a longing glance at Jason, ere she saw thy children twain; but then she veiled her eyes and turned her blanching cheek away, disgusted at their coming; but thy husband tried to check his young bride's angry humour with these words: "O, be not angered 'gainst thy friends; cease from wrath and turn once more thy face this way, counting as friends whomso thy husband counts, and accept these gifts, and for my sake crave thy sire to remit these children's exile." Soon as she saw the

ornaments, no longer she held out, but yielded to her lord in all; and ere the father and his sons were far from the palace gone, she took the broidered robe and put it on, and set the golden crown about her tresses, arranging her hair at her bright mirror, with many a happy smile at her breathless counterfeit. Then rising from her seat she passed across the chamber, tripping lightly on her fair white foot, exulting in the gift, with many a glance at her uplifted ankle. When lo! a scene of awful horror did ensue. In a moment she turned pale, reeled backwards, trembling in every limb, and sinks upon a seat scarce soon enough to save herself from falling to the ground. An aged dame, one of her company, thinking belike it was a fit from Pan or some god sent, raised a cry of prayer, till from her mouth she saw the foam-flakes issue, her eyeballs rolling in their sockets, and all the blood her face desert; then did she raise a loud scream far different from her former cry. Forthwith one handmaid rushed to her father's house, another to her new bridegroom to tell his bride's sad fate, and the whole house echoed with their running to and fro. By this time would a quick walker have made the turn in a course of six plethra [3] and reached the goal, when she with one awful shriek awoke, poor sufferer, from her speechless trance and oped her closed eyes, for against her a twofold anguish was warring. The chaplet of gold about her head was sending forth a wondrous stream of ravening flame, while the fine raiment, thy children's gift, was preying on the hapless maiden's fair white flesh; and she starts from her seat in a blaze and seeks to fly, shaking her hair and head this way and that, to cast the crown therefrom; but the gold held firm to its fastenings, and the flame, as she shook her locks, blazed forth the more with double fury. Then to the earth she sinks, by the cruel blow o'ercome; past all recognition now save to a father's eye; for her eyes had lost their tranquil gaze, her face no more its natural look preserved, and from the crown of her head blood and fire in mingled stream ran down; and from her bones the flesh kept peeling off beneath the gnawing of those secret drugs, e'en as when the pine-tree weeps its tears of pitch, a fearsome sight to see. And all were afraid to touch the corpse, for we were warned by what had chanced. Anon came her hapless father unto the house, all unwitting of her doom, and stumbles o'er the dead, and loud he cried, and folding his arms about her kissed her, with words like these the while, "O my poor, poor child, which of the gods hath destroyed thee thus foully? Who is robbing me of thee, old as I am and ripe for death? O my child, alas! would I could die with thee!" He ceased his sad lament, and would have raised his aged frame, but found himself held fast by the fine-spun robe as ivy that clings to the branches of the bay, and then ensued a fearful struggle. He strove to rise, but she still held him back; and if ever he pulled with all his might, from off his bones his aged flesh he tore. At last he gave it up, and breathed forth his soul in

awful suffering; for he could no longer master the pain. So there they lie, daughter and aged sire, dead side by side, a grievous sight that calls for tears. And as for thee, I leave thee out of my consideration, for thyself must discover a means to escape punishment. Not now for the first time I think this human life a shadow; yea, and without shrinking I will say that they amongst men who pretend to wisdom and expend deep thought on words do incur a serious charge of folly; for amongst mortals no man is happy; wealth may pour in and make one luckier than another, but none can happy be.

(*The* MESSENGER *departs.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This day the deity, it seems, will mass on Jason, as he well deserves, a heavy load of evils. Woe is thee, daughter of Creon! We pity thy sad fate, gone as thou art to Hades' halls as the price of thy marriage with Jason.

MEDEA

My friends, I am resolved upon the deed; at once will I slay my children and then leave this land, without delaying long enough to hand them over to some more savage hand to butcher. Needs must they die in any case; and since they must, I will slay them—I, the mother that bare them. O heart of mine, steel thyself! Why do I hesitate to do the awful deed that must be done? Come, take the sword, thou wretched hand of mine! Take it, and advance to the post whence starts thy life of sorrow! Away with cowardice! Give not one thought to thy babes, how dear they are or how thou art their mother. This one brief day forget thy children dear, and after that lament; for though thou wilt slay them yet they were thy darlings still, and I am a lady of sorrows.

(MEDEA *enters the house.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O earth, O sun whose beam illumines all, look, look upon this lost woman, ere she stretch forth her murderous hand upon her sons for blood; for lo! these are scions of thy own golden seed, and the blood of gods is in danger of being shed by man. O light, from Zeus proceeding, stay her, hold her hand, forth from the house chase this fell bloody fiend by demons led. Vainly wasted were the throes thy children cost thee; vainly hast thou borne, it seems, sweet babes, O thou who hast left behind thee that passage through the blue Symplegades, that strangers justly hate. Ah! hapless one, why doth fierce anger thy soul assail? Why in its place is fell murder growing up? For grievous unto mortal men are pollutions that come of kindred blood poured on the earth, woes to suit each crime hurled from heaven on the murderer's house.

FIRST SON (*within*)

Ah, me; what can I do? Whither fly to escape my mother's blows?

SECOND SON (*within*)

I know not, sweet brother mine; we are lost.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Didst hear, didst hear the children's cry? O lady, born to sorrow, victim of an evil fate! Shall I enter the house? For the children's sake I am resolved to ward off the murder.

FIRST SON (*within*)

Yea, by heaven I adjure you; help, your aid is needed.

SECOND SON (*within*)

Even now the toils of the sword are closing round us.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O hapless mother, surely thou hast a heart of stone or steel to slay the offspring of thy womb by such a murderous doom. Of all the wives of yore I know but one who laid her hand upon her children dear, even Ino, whom the gods did madden in the day that the wife of Zeus drove her wandering from her home. But she, poor sufferer, flung herself into the sea because of the foul murder of her children, leaping o'er the wave-beat cliff, and in her death was she united to her children twain. Can there be any deed of horror left to follow this? Woe for the wooing of women fraught with disaster! What sorrows hast thou caused for men ere now!

(JASON *and his attendants enter.*)

JASON

Ladies, stationed near this house, pray tell me is the author of these hideous deeds, Medea, still within, or hath she fled from hence? For she must hide beneath the earth or soar on wings towards heaven's vault, if she would avoid the vengeance of the royal house. Is she so sure she will escape herself unpunished from this house, when she hath slain the rulers of the land? But enough of this! I am forgetting her children. As for her, those whom she hath wronged will do the like by her; but I am come to save the children's life, lest the victim's kin visit their wrath on me, in vengeance for the murder foul, wrought by my children's mother.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unhappy man, thou knowest not the full extent of thy misery, else had thou never said those words.

JASON

How now? Can she want to kill me too?

LEADER

Thy sons are dead; slain by their own mother's hand.

JASON

O God! what sayest thou? Woman, thou hast sealed my doom.

LEADER

Thy children are no more; be sure of this.

JASON

Where slew she them; within the palace or outside?

LEADER

Throw wide the doors and see thy children's murdered corpses.

JASON

Haste, ye slaves, loose the bolts, undo the fastenings, that I may see the sight of twofold woe, my murdered sons and her, whose blood in vengeance I will shed.

(MEDEA *appears above the house, on a chariot drawn by dragons; the children's corpses are beside her.*)

MEDEA

Why shake those doors and attempt to loose their bolts, in quest of the dead and me their murderess? From such toil desist. If thou wouldst aught with me, say on, if so thou wilt; but never shalt thou lay hand on me, so swift the steeds the sun, my father's sire, to me doth give to save me from the hand of my foes.

JASON

Accursed woman! by gods, by me and all mankind abhorred as never woman was, who hadst the heart to stab thy babes, thou their mother, leaving me undone and childless; this hast thou done and still dost gaze upon the sun and earth after this deed most impious. Curses on thee! I now perceive what then I missed in the day I brought thee, fraught with doom, from thy home in a barbarian land to dwell in Hellas, traitress to thy sire and to the land that nurtured thee. On me the gods have hurled the curse that dogged thy steps, for thou didst slay thy brother at his hearth ere thou cam'st aboard our fair ship, Argo. Such was the outset of thy life of crime; then didst thou wed with me, and having borne me sons to glut thy passion's lust, thou now hast slain them. Not one amongst the wives of Hellas e'er had dared this deed; yet before them all I chose

thee for my wife, wedding a foe to be my doom, no woman, but a lioness fiercer than Tyrrhene Scylla in nature. But with reproaches heaped a thousandfold I cannot wound thee, so brazen is thy nature. Perish, vile sorceress, murderess of thy babes! Whilst I must mourn my luckless fate, for I shall ne'er enjoy my new-found bride, nor shall I have the children, whom I bred and reared, alive to say the last farewell to me; nay, I have lost them.

MEDEA

To this thy speech I could have made a long reply, but Father Zeus knows well all I have done for thee, and the treatment thou hast given me. Yet thou wert not ordained to scorn my love and lead a life of joy in mockery of me, nor was thy royal bride nor Creon, who gave thee a second wife, to thrust me from this land and rue it not. Wherefore, if thou wilt, call me e'en a lioness, and Scylla, whose home is in the Tyrrhene land; for I in turn have wrung thy heart, as well I might.

JASON

Thou, too, art grieved thyself, and sharest in my sorrow.

MEDEA

Be well assured I am; but it relieves my pain to know thou canst not mock at me.

JASON

O my children, how vile a mother ye have found!

MEDEA

My sons, your father's feeble lust has been your ruin!

JASON

'Twas not my hand, at any rate, that slew them.

MEDEA

No, but thy foul treatment of me, and thy new marriage.

JASON

Didst think that marriage cause enough to murder them?

MEDEA

Dost think a woman counts this a trifling injury?

JASON

So she be self-restrained; but in thy eyes all is evil.

MEDEA

Thy sons are dead and gone. That will stab thy heart.

JASON

They live, methinks, to bring a curse upon thy head.

MEDEA

The gods know, whoso of them began this troublous coil.

JASON

Indeed, they know that hateful heart of thine.

MEDEA

Thou art as hateful. I am aweary of thy bitter tongue.

JASON

And I likewise of thine. But parting is easy.

MEDEA

Say how; what am I to do? for I am fain as thou to go.

JASON

Give up to me those dead, to bury and lament.

MEDEA

No, never! I will bury them myself, bearing them to Hera's sacred field,[4] who watches o'er the Cape, that none of their foes may insult them by pulling down their tombs; and in this land of Sisyphus I will ordain hereafter a solemn feast and mystic rites to atone for this impious murder. Myself will now to the land of Erechtheus, to dwell with Aegeus, Pandion's son. But thou, as well thou mayst, shalt die a caitiff's death,[5] thy head crushed 'neath a shattered relic of Argo, when thou hast seen the bitter ending of my marriage.

JASON

The curse of our sons' avenging spirit and of Justice, that calls for blood, be on thee!

MEDEA

What god or power divine hears thee, breaker of oaths and every law of hospitality?

JASON

Fie upon thee! cursed witch! child-murderess!

MEDEA

To thy house! go, bury thy wife.

JASON

I go, bereft of both my sons.

MEDEA

Thy grief is yet to come; wait till old age is with thee too.

JASON

O my dear, dear children!

MEDEA

Dear to their mother, not to thee.

JASON

And yet thou didst slay them?

MEDEA

Yea, to vex thy heart.

JASON

One last fond kiss, ah me! I fain would on their lips imprint.

MEDEA

Embraces now, and fond farewells for them; but then a cold repulse!

JASON

By heaven I do adjure thee, let me touch their tender skin.

MEDEA

No, no! in vain this word has sped its flight.

JASON

O Zeus, dost hear how I am driven hence; dost mark the treatment I receive from this she-lion, fell murderess of her young? Yet so far as I may and can, I raise for them a dirge, and do adjure the gods to witness how thou hast slain my sons, and wilt not suffer me to embrace or bury their dead bodies. Would I had never begotten them to see thee slay them after all!

(*The chariot carries* MEDEA *away.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Many a fate doth Zeus dispense, high on his Olympian throne; oft do the gods bring things to pass beyond man's expectation; that, which we thought would be, is not fulfilled, while for the unlooked-for, god finds out a way; and such hath been the issue of this matter.[6]

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 37, 184, 229, 232, 236, 577, 578, 592, 690, 1049, 1089, 1272, 1351.

1. Coleridge renders thus the Greek noun, *sophrosyna,* which is difficult if not impossible to translate into English by a single word. Its core of meaning includes the notions of self-restraint, self-control, temperance, and moderation.

2. This choral ode in praise of Athens is one of the most famous in Euripides. The *Medea* itself is noteworthy for the high quality of its poetry.

3. A *plethron* was approximately 100 feet.

4. This probably refers to a temple of Hera on the Acrocorinthus. Medea's words would therefore be in general agreement with the cult tradition that the children were buried in Corinth.

5. Coleridge's note here reads, "Legend told how Jason was slain by a beam falling on him as he lay asleep under the shadow of his ship Argo."

6. These lines, here with a slight addition, are likewise found at the conclusion of the *Alcestis, Helen, The Bacchae,* and the *Andromache.*

III
HIPPOLYTUS

Characters in the Play

Aphrodite
Hippolytus, *bastard son of* Theseus
Attendants of Hippolytus
Chorus of Troezenian Women
Nurse of Phaedra
Phaedra, *wife of* Theseus
Theseus
Messenger
Artemis

INTRODUCTION

EURIPIDES produced the *Hippolytus* in the spring of 428 B.C. He had already written one tragedy with this title, not now extant, which the Athenians did not receive with favour. Hence our present piece is evidently a reworking of the first version, and in the form in which we now have it, in the opinion of many, is by far the greatest of Euripides' plays. Its tone in many places is almost Sophoclean, and yet it contains as well lyric passages, marked by an awareness of nature's beauty, which have a distinct romantic ring. The plot is relatively simple and depends but slightly upon events that have transpired prior to the opening of the play. We need know only that Theseus is now living with his new and younger wife, Phaedra, at Troezen. With them dwells a bastard son of Theseus named Hippolytus, whom the queen of the Amazons had borne him in his youth. The drama grows directly from this situation and in the end unfolds the tragedy of these three persons.

Despite its apparent simplicity, the play is most difficult to interpret. Critics tend to reduce the tragedy to a study of the conflict between the two forces symbolized by Artemis and Aphrodite—sexual purity, ascetism over against passionate love. These symbols have their human proponents in Hippolytus and Phaedra. One might be tempted to argue that if each had not been guilty of going to extremes, there would have been no tragic outcome. Such an interpretation, however, seems to lead to an over-simplification, for the characters and the problem, when examined carefully, prove to be far more complicated. Hippolytus is clearly a victim of *hybris*, overweening pride. Pure and chaste though he actually may be, he is pure in his own conceit. Likewise, though Phaedra has struggled courageously to overcome her passion for Hippolytus, at the last she exhibits a fatal weakness. Also Theseus, who does not function symbolically, as in a sense Phaedra and Hippolytus do, and on whom the heaviest burden of the tragedy falls at the end, pays the penalty not only for his incontinence as a youth, but also for his hasty condemnation of his son. The clash of these relatively complex characters renders suspect any simplified interpretation of the play.

One of the most powerful features of the tragedy is the manner in which Euripides rehabilitates the character of Hippolytus just before

he dies. The young man's eyes are at last opened; no longer is he preoccupied with his own purity, but he is able to get outside himself, see the situation from Theseus' point of view, and to realize that his father's fate to live is far worse than his own to die. This awakening of Hippolytus, accomplished partly by his own suffering and partly through Artemis (who appears at the close as a *deus ex machina*) to whose worship he has devoted his life and who comforts him in death, raises the play to a universal level reached only by the greatest tragedy.

The rôle which the gods perform in the drama is most puzzling to explain. As has already been noted, both Artemis and Aphrodite serve partially as symbols, but on the other hand they do not seem to be completely devoid of religious significance. What constitutes the major difficulty is that they seem to be capricious, vindictive, and jealous of each other. Aphrodite announces in the prologue that she is going to punish Hippolytus for neglecting her worship, and Artemis at the end vows she will exact her vengeance from Aphrodite for her favorite's death. Here as always Euripides' theological thought is unclear. On the human level, the poet's grasp of his problem is firm. Phaedra, Hippolytus and Theseus all have the stature of tragic figures. We can only conclude either that Euripides believed it to be a matter of little importance that man strive to understand the nature of the divine power, which is ultimately inscrutable and therefore should be completely accepted as such, or that he was so interested in analyzing man's emotional and psychological states that he never came finally to grips with the problems of religion.

HIPPOLYTUS

(SCENE:—*Before the royal palace at Troezen. There is a statue of* APHRODITE *on one side; on the other, a statue of* ARTEMIS. *There is an altar before each image. The goddess* APHRODITE *appears alone.*)

APHRODITE

WIDE o'er man my realm extends, and proud the name that I, the goddess Cypris, bear, both in heaven's courts and 'mongst all those who dwell within the limits of the sea and the bounds of Atlas, beholding the sun-god's light; those that respect my power I advance to honour, but bring to ruin all who vaunt themselves at me. For even in the race of gods this feeling finds a home, even pleasure at the honour men pay them. And the truth of this I soon will show; for that son of Theseus, born of the Amazon, Hippolytus, whom holy Pittheus taught, alone of all the dwellers in this land of Troezen, calls me vilest of the deities. Love he scorns, and, as for marriage, will none of it; but Artemis, daughter of Zeus, sister of Phoebus, he doth honour, counting her the chief of goddesses, and ever through the greenwood, attendant on his virgin goddess, he clears the earth of wild beasts with his fleet hounds, enjoying the comradeship of one too high for mortal ken. 'Tis not this I grudge him, no! why should I? But for his sins against me, I will this very day take vengeance on Hippolytus; for long ago I cleared the ground of many obstacles, so it needs but trifling toil. For as he came one day from the home of Pittheus to witness the solemn mystic rites and be initiated therein in Pandion's land, Phaedra, his father's noble wife, caught sight of him, and by my designs she found her heart was seized with wild desire. And ere she came to this Troezenian realm, a temple did she rear to Cypris hard by the rock of Pallas where it o'erlooks this country, for love of the youth in another land; and to win his love in days to come she called after his name the temple she had founded for the goddess. Now, when Theseus left the land of Cecrops, flying the pollution of the blood of Pallas' sons, and with his wife sailed to this shore, content to suffer exile for a year, then began the wretched wife to pine away in silence, moaning 'neath love's cruel scourge, and none of her servants knows what disease afflicts her. But this passion of hers must

not fail thus. No, I will discover the matter to Theseus, and all shall be laid bare. Then will the father slay his child, my bitter foe, by curses, for the lord Poseidon granted this boon to Theseus; three wishes of the god to ask, nor ever ask in vain. So Phaedra is to die, an honoured death 'tis true, but still to die; for I will not let her suffering outweigh the payment of such forfeit by my foes as shall satisfy my honour. But lo! I see the son of Theseus coming hither—Hippolytus, fresh from the labours of the chase. I will get me hence. At his back follows a long train of retainers, in joyous cries of revelry uniting and hymns of praise to Artemis, his goddess; for little he recks that Death hath oped his gates for him, and that this is his last look upon the light.

(APHRODITE *vanishes.* HIPPOLYTUS *and his retinue of hunting* ATTENDANTS *enter, singing. They move to worship at the altar of* ARTEMIS.)

HIPPOLYTUS

Come follow, friends, singing to Artemis, daughter of Zeus, throned in the sky, whose votaries we are.

ATTENDANTS

Lady goddess, awful queen, daughter of Zeus, all hail! hail! child of Latona and of Zeus, peerless mid the virgin choir, who hast thy dwelling in heaven's wide mansions at thy noble father's court, in the golden house of Zeus. All hail! most beauteous Artemis, lovelier far than all the daughters of Olympus!

HIPPOLYTUS (*speaking*)

For thee, O mistress mine, I bring this woven wreath, culled from a virgin meadow, where nor shepherd dares to herd his flock nor ever scythe hath mown, but o'er the mead unshorn the bee doth wing its way in spring; and with the dew from rivers drawn purity that garden tends. Such as know no cunning lore, yet in whose nature self-control, made perfect, hath a home, these may pluck the flowers, but not the wicked world. Accept, I pray, dear mistress, mine this chaplet from my holy hand to crown thy locks of gold; for I, and none other of mortals, have this high guerdon, to be with thee, with thee converse, hearing thy voice, though not thy face beholding. So be it mine to end my life as I began.

LEADER OF THE ATTENDANTS

My prince! we needs must call upon the gods, our lords, so wilt thou listen to a friendly word from me?

HIPPOLYTUS

Why, that will I! else were I proved a fool.

LEADER

Dost know, then, the way of the world?

HIPPOLYTUS

Not I; but wherefore such a question?

LEADER

It hates reserve which careth not for all men's love.

HIPPOLYTUS

And rightly too; reserve in man is ever galling.

LEADER

But there's a charm in courtesy?

HIPPOLYTUS

The greatest surely; aye, and profit, too, at trifling cost.

LEADER

Dost think the same law holds in heaven as well?

HIPPOLYTUS

I trow it doth, since all our laws we men from heaven draw.

LEADER

Why, then, dost thou neglect to greet an august goddess?

HIPPOLYTUS

Whom speak'st thou of? Keep watch upon thy tongue lest it some mischief cause.

LEADER

Cypris I mean, whose image is stationed o'er thy gate.

HIPPOLYTUS

I greet her from afar, preserving still my chastity.

LEADER

Yet is she an august goddess, far renowned on earth.

HIPPOLYTUS

'Mongst gods as well as men we have our several preferences.

LEADER

I wish thee luck, and wisdom too, so far as thou dost need it.

HIPPOLYTUS

No god, whose worship craves the night, hath charms for me.

LEADER

My son, we should avail us of the gifts that gods confer.

HIPPOLYTUS

Go in, my faithful followers, and make ready food within the house; a well-filled board hath charms after the chase is o'er. Rub down my steeds ye must, that when I have had my fill I may yoke them to the chariot and give them proper exercise. As for thy Queen of Love, a long farewell to her.

(HIPPOLYTUS *goes into the palace, followed by all the* ATTENDANTS *except the* LEADER, *who prays before the statue of* APHRODITE.)

LEADER

Meantime I with sober mind, for I must not copy my young master, do offer up my prayer to thy image, lady Cypris, in such words as it becomes a slave to use. But thou should'st pardon all, who, in youth's impetuous heat, speak idle words of thee; make as though thou hearest not, for gods must needs be wiser than the sons of men.

(*The* LEADER *goes into the palace. The* CHORUS OF TROEZENIAN WOMEN *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

A rock there is, where, as they say, the ocean dew distils, and from its beetling brow it pours a copious stream for pitchers to be dipped therein; 'twas here I had a friend washing robes of purple in the trickling stream, and she was spreading them out on the face of a warm sunny rock; from her I had the tidings, first of all, that my mistress—

antistrophe 1

Was wasting on the bed of sickness, pent within her house, a thin veil o'ershadowing her head of golden hair. And this is the third day I hear that she hath closed her lovely lips and denied her chaste body all sustenance, eager to hide her suffering and reach death's cheerless bourn.

strophe 2

Maiden, thou must be possessed, by Pan made frantic or by Hecate, or by the Corybantes dread, and Cybele the mountain mother. Or maybe thou hast sinned against Dictynna, huntress-queen, and art wasting for thy guilt in sacrifice unoffered. For she doth range o'er lakes' expanse and past the bounds of earth upon the ocean's tossing billows.

antistrophe 2

Or doth some rival in thy house beguile thy lord, the captain of Erechtheus' sons, that hero nobly born, to secret amours hid from thee? Or hath some mariner sailing hither from Crete reached this port that sailors love, with evil tidings for our queen, and she with sorrow for her grievous fate is to her bed confined?

epode

Yea, and oft o'er woman's wayward nature settles a feeling of miserable helplessness, arising from pains of child-birth or of passionate desire. I, too, have felt at times this sharp thrill shoot through me, but I would cry to Artemis, queen of archery, who comes from heaven to aid us in our travail, and thanks to heaven's grace she ever comes at my call with welcome help. Look! where the aged nurse is bringing her forth from the house before the door, while on her brow the cloud of gloom is deepening. My soul longs to learn what is her grief, the canker that is wasting our queen's fading charms.

(PHAEDRA *is led out and placed upon a couch by the* NURSE *and attendants. The following lines between the* NURSE *and* PHAEDRA *are chanted.*)

NURSE

O, the ills of mortal men! the cruel diseases they endure! What can I do for thee? from what refrain? Here is the bright sun-light, here the azure sky; lo! we have brought thee on thy bed of sickness without the palace; for all thy talk was of coming hither, but soon back to thy chamber wilt thou hurry. Disappointment follows fast with thee, thou hast no joy in aught for long; the present has no power to please; on something absent next thy heart is set. Better be sick than tend the sick; the first is but a single ill, the last unites mental grief with manual toil. Man's whole life is full of anguish; no respite from his woes he finds; but if there is aught to love beyond this life, night's dark pall doth wrap it round. And so we show our mad love of this life because its light is shed on earth, and because we know no other, and have naught revealed to us of all our earth may hide; and trusting to fables we drift at random.

PHAEDRA (*wildly*)

Lift my body, raise my head! My limbs are all unstrung, kind friends. O handmaids, lift my arms, my shapely arms. The tire on my head is too heavy for me to wear; away with it, and let my tresses o'er my shoulders fall.

NURSE

Be of good heart, dear child; toss not so wildly to and fro. Lie still, be brave, so wilt thou find thy sickness easier to bear; suffering for mortals is nature's iron law.

PHAEDRA

Ah! would I could draw a draught of water pure from some dew-fed spring, and lay me down to rest in the grassy meadow 'neath the poplar's shade!

NURSE

My child, what wild speech is this? O say not such things in public, wild whirling words of frenzy bred!

PHAEDRA

Away to the mountain take me! to the wood, to the pine-trees I will go, where hounds pursue the prey, hard on the scent of dappled fawns. Ye gods! what joy to hark them on, to grasp the barbed dart, to poise Thessalian hunting-spears close to my golden hair, then let them fly.

NURSE

Why, why, my child, these anxious cares? What hast thou to do with the chase? Why so eager for the flowing spring, when hard by these towers stands a hill well watered, whence thou may'st freely draw?

PHAEDRA

O Artemis, who watchest o'er sea-beat Limna and the race-course thundering to the horse's hoofs, would I were upon thy plains curbing Venetian steeds!

NURSE

Why betray thy frenzy in these wild whirling words? Now thou wert for hasting hence to the hills away to hunt wild beasts, and now thy yearning is to drive the steed over the waveless sands. This needs a cunning seer to say what god it is that reins thee from the course, distracting thy senses, child.

PHAEDRA (*more sanely*)

Ah me! alas! what have I done? Whither have I strayed, my senses leaving? Mad, mad! stricken by some demon's curse! Woe is me! Cover my head again, nurse. Shame fills me for the words I have spoken. Hide me then; from my eyes the tear-drops stream, and for very shame I turn them away. 'Tis painful coming to one's senses

again, and madness, evil though it be, has this advantage, that one has no knowledge of reason's overthrow.

NURSE

There then I cover thee; but when will death hide my body in the grave? Many a lesson length of days is teaching me. Yea, mortal men should pledge themselves to moderate friendships only, not to such as reach the very heart's core; affection's ties should be light upon them to let them slip or draw them tight. For one poor heart to grieve for twain, as I do for my mistress, is a burden sore to bear. Men say that too engrossing pursuits in life more oft cause disappointment than pleasure, and too oft are foes to health. Wherefore I do not praise excess so much as moderation, and with me wise men will agree.

(PHAEDRA *lies back upon the couch.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS (*speaking*)

O aged dame, faithful nurse of Phaedra, our queen, we see her sorry plight; but what it is that ails her we cannot discern, so fain would learn of thee and hear thy opinion.

NURSE

I question her, but am no wiser, for she will not answer.

LEADER

Nor tell what source these sorrows have?

NURSE

The same answer thou must take, for she is dumb on every point.

LEADER

How weak and wasted is her body!

NURSE

What marvel? 'tis three days now since she has tasted food.

LEADER

Is this infatuation, or an attempt to die?

NURSE

'Tis death she courts; such fasting aims at ending life.

LEADER

A strange story if it satisfies her husband.

NURSE

She hides from him her sorrow, and vows she is not ill.

LEADER

Can he not guess it from her face?

NURSE

He is not now in his own country.

LEADER

But dost not thou insist in thy endeavour to find out her complaint, her crazy mind?

NURSE

I have tried every plan, and all in vain; yet not even now will I relax my zeal, that thou too, if thou stayest, mayst witness my devotion to my unhappy mistress. Come, come, my darling child, let us forget, the twain of us, our former words; be thou more mild, smoothing that sullen brow and changing the current of thy thought, and I, if in aught before I failed in humouring thee, will let that be and find some better course. If thou art sick with ills thou canst not name, there be women here to help to set thee right; but if thy trouble can to men's ears be divulged, speak, that physicians may pronounce on it. Come, then, why so dumb? Thou shouldst not so remain, my child, but scold me if I speak amiss, or, if I give good counsel, yield assent. One word, one look this way! Ah me! Friends, we waste our toil to no purpose; we are as far away as ever; she would not relent to my arguments then, nor is she yielding now. Well, grow more stubborn than the sea, yet be assured of this, that if thou diest thou art a traitress to thy children, for they will ne'er inherit their father's halls, nay, by that knightly queen the Amazon who bore a son to lord it over thine, a bastard born but not a bastard bred, whom well thou knowest, e'en Hippolytus—

(*At the mention of his name* PHAEDRA'S *attention is suddenly caught.*)

PHAEDRA

Oh! oh!

NURSE

Ha! doth that touch the quick?

PHAEDRA

Thou hast undone me, nurse; I do adjure by the gods, mention that man no more.

NURSE

There now! thou art thyself again, but e'en yet refusest to aid thy children and preserve thy life.

PHAEDRA

My babes I love, but there is another storm that buffets me.

NURSE

Daughter, are thy hands from bloodshed pure?

PHAEDRA

My hands are pure, but on my soul there rests a stain.

NURSE

The issue of some enemy's secret witchery?

PHAEDRA

A friend is my destroyer, one unwilling as myself.

NURSE

Hath Theseus wronged thee in any wise?

PHAEDRA

Never may I prove untrue to him!

NURSE

Then what strange mystery is there that drives thee on to die?

PHAEDRA

O, let my sin and me alone! 'tis not 'gainst thee I sin.

NURSE

Never willingly! and, if I fail, 'twill rest at thy door.

PHAEDRA

How now? thou usest force in clinging to my hand.

NURSE

Yea, and I will never loose my hold upon thy knees.

PHAEDRA

Alas for thee! my sorrows, shouldst thou learn them, would recoil on thee.

NURSE

What keener grief for me than failing to win thee?

PHAEDRA

'Twill be death to thee; though to me that brings renown.

NURSE

And dost thou then conceal this boon despite my prayers?

PHAEDRA
I do, for 'tis out of shame I am planning an honourable escape.

NURSE
Tell it, and thine honour shall the brighter shine.

PHAEDRA
Away, I do conjure thee; loose my hand.

NURSE
I will not, for the boon thou shouldst have granted me is denied.

PHAEDRA
I will grant it out of reverence for thy holy suppliant touch.

NURSE
Henceforth I hold my peace; 'tis thine to speak from now.

PHAEDRA
Ah! hapless mother, what a love was thine!

NURSE
Her love for the bull? daughter, or what meanest thou?

PHAEDRA
And woe to thee! my sister, bride of Dionysus.

NURSE
What ails thee, child? speaking ill of kith and kin.

PHAEDRA
Myself the third to suffer! how am I undone!

NURSE
Thou strik'st me dumb! Where will this history end?

PHAEDRA
That "love" has been our curse from time long past.

NURSE
I know no more of what I fain would learn.

PHAEDRA
Ah! would thou couldst say for me what I have to tell.

NURSE
I am no prophetess to unriddle secrets.

PHAEDRA

What is it they mean when they talk of people being in "love"?

NURSE

At once the sweetest and the bitterest thing, my child.

PHAEDRA

I shall only find the latter half.

NURSE

Ha! my child, art thou in love?

PHAEDRA

The Amazon's son, whoever he may be—

NURSE

Mean'st thou Hippolytus?

PHAEDRA

'Twas thou, not I, that spoke his name.

NURSE

O heavens! what is this, my child? Thou hast ruined me. Outrageous! friends; I will not live and bear it; hateful is life, hateful to mine eyes the light. This body I resign, will cast it off, and rid me of existence by my death. Farewell, my life is o'er. Yea, for the chaste [1] have wicked passions, 'gainst their will maybe, but still they have. Cypris, it seems, is not a goddess after all, but something greater far, for she hath been the ruin of my lady and of me and our whole family.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O, too clearly didst thou hear our queen uplift her voice to tell her startling tale of piteous suffering. Come death ere I reach thy state of feeling, loved mistress. O horrible! woe, for these miseries! woe, for the sorrows on which mortals feed! Thou art undone! thou hast disclosed thy sin to heaven's light. What hath each passing day and every hour in store for thee? Some strange event will come to pass in this house. For it is no longer uncertain where the star of thy love is setting, thou hapless daughter of Crete.

PHAEDRA

Women of Troezen, who dwell here upon the frontier edge of Pelops' land, oft ere now in heedless mood through the long hours of night have I wondered why man's life is spoiled; and it seems to me their evil case is not due to any natural fault of judgment, for there be many dowered with sense, but we must view the matter in this light: by teaching and ex-

perience we learn the right but neglect it in practice, some from sloth, others from preferring pleasure of some kind or other to duty. Now life has many pleasures, protracted talk, and leisure, that seductive evil; likewise there is shame which is of two kinds, one a noble quality, the other a curse to families; but if for each its proper time were clearly known, these twain could not have had the selfsame letters to denote them. So then since I had made up my mind on these points, 'twas not likely any drug would alter it and make me think the contrary. And I will tell thee too the way my judgment went. When love wounded me, I bethought me how I best might bear the smart. So from that day forth I began to hide in silence what I suffered. For I put no faith in counsellors, who know well to lecture others for presumption, yet themselves have countless troubles of their own. Next I did devise noble endurance of these wanton thoughts, striving by continence for victory. And last when I could not succeed in mastering love hereby, methought it best to die; and none can gainsay my purpose. For fain I would my virtue should to all appear, my shame have few to witness it. I knew my sickly passion now; to yield to it I saw how infamous; and more, I learnt to know so well that I was but a woman, a thing the world detests. Curses, hideous curses on that wife who first did shame her marriage-vow for lovers other than her lord! 'Twas from noble families this curse began to spread among our sex. For when the noble countenance disgrace, poor folk of course will think that it is right. Those too I hate who make profession of purity,[1] though in secret reckless sinners. How can these, queen Cypris, ocean's child, e'er look their husbands in the face? do they never feel one guilty thrill that their accomplice, night, or the chambers of their house will find a voice and speak? This it is that calls on me to die, kind friends, that so I may ne'er be found to have disgraced my lord, or the children I have borne; no! may they grow up and dwell in glorious Athens, free to speak and act, heirs to such fair fame as a mother can bequeath. For to know that father or mother has sinned doth turn the stoutest heart to slavishness. This alone, men say, can stand the buffets of life's battle, a just and virtuous soul in whomsoever found. For time unmasks the villain soon or late, holding up to them a mirror as to some blooming maid. 'Mongst such may I be never seen!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Now look! how fair is chastity [1] however viewed, whose fruit is good repute amongst men.

NURSE

My queen, 'tis true thy tale of woe, but lately told, did for the moment strike me with wild alarm, but now I do reflect upon my foolishness;

second thoughts are often best even with men. Thy fate is no uncommon one nor past one's calculations; thou art stricken by the passion Cypris sends. Thou art in love; what wonder? so are many more. Wilt thou, because thou lov'st, destroy thyself? 'Tis little gain, I trow, for those who love or yet may love their fellows, if death must be their end; for though the Love-Queen's onset in her might is more than man can bear, yet doth she gently visit yielding hearts, and only when she finds a proud unnatural spirit, doth she take and mock it past belief. Her path is in the sky, and mid the ocean's surge she rides; from her all nature springs; she sows the seeds of love, inspires the warm desire to which we sons of earth all owe our being. They who have aught to do with books of ancient scribes, or themselves engage in studious pursuits, know how Zeus of Semele was enamoured, how the bright-eyed goddess of the Dawn once stole Cephalus to dwell in heaven for the love she bore him; yet these in heaven abide nor shun the gods' approach, content, I trow, to yield to their misfortune. Wilt thou refuse to yield? thy sire, it seems, should have begotten thee on special terms or with different gods for masters, if in these laws thou wilt not acquiesce. How many, prithee, men of sterling sense, when they see their wives unfaithful, make as though they saw it not? How many fathers, when their sons have gone astray, assist them in their amours? 'Tis part of human wisdom to conceal the deed of shame. Nor should man aim at too great refinement in his life; for they cannot with exactness finish e'en the roof that covers in a house; and how dost thou, after falling into so deep a pit, think to escape? Nay, if thou hast more of good than bad, thou wilt fare exceeding well, thy human nature considered. O cease, my darling child, from evil thoughts, let wanton pride be gone, for this is naught else, this wish to rival gods in perfectness. Face thy love; 'tis heaven's will thou shouldst. Sick thou art, yet turn thy sickness to some happy issue. For there are charms and spells to soothe the soul; surely some cure for thy disease will be found. Men, no doubt, might seek it long and late if our women's minds no scheme devise.

LEADER

Although she gives thee at thy present need the wiser counsel, Phaedra, yet do I praise thee. Still my praise may sound more harsh and jar more cruelly on thy ear than her advice.

PHAEDRA

'Tis even this, too plausible a tongue, that overthrows good governments and homes of men. We should not speak to please the ear but point the path that leads to noble fame.

NURSE

What means this solemn speech? Thou needst not rounded phrases,—but a man. Straightway must we move to tell him frankly how it is with thee. Had not thy life to such a crisis come, or wert thou with self-control [1] endowed, ne'er would I to gratify thy passions have urged thee to this course; but now 'tis a struggle fierce to save thy life, and therefore less to blame.

PHAEDRA

Accursed proposal! peace, woman! never utter those shameful words again!

NURSE

Shameful, maybe, yet for thee better than honour's code. Better this deed, if it shall save thy life, than that name thy pride will kill thee to retain.

PHAEDRA

I conjure thee, go no further! for thy words are plausible but infamous; for though as yet love has not undermined my soul, yet, if in specious words thou dress thy foul suggestion, I shall be beguiled into the snare from which I am now escaping.

NURSE

If thou art of this mind, 'twere well thou ne'er hadst sinned; but as it is, hear me; for that is the next best course; I in my house have charms to soothe thy love,—'twas but now I thought of them;—these shall cure thee of thy sickness on no disgraceful terms, thy mind unhurt, if thou wilt be but brave. But from him thou lovest we must get some token, a word or fragment of his robe, and thereby unite in one love's twofold stream.

PHAEDRA

Is thy drug a salve or potion?

NURSE

I cannot tell; be content, my child, to profit by it and ask no questions.

PHAEDRA

I fear me thou wilt prove too wise for me.

NURSE

If thou fear this, confess thyself afraid of all; but why thy terror?

PHAEDRA

Lest thou shouldst breathe a word of this to Theseus' son.

NURSE

Peace, my child! I will do all things well; only be thou, queen Cypris, ocean's child, my partner in the work! And for the rest of my purpose, it will be enough for me to tell it to our friends within the house.

(*The* NURSE *goes into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Love, Love, that from the eyes diffusest soft desire, bringing on the souls of those, whom thou dost camp against, sweet grace, O never in evil mood appear to me, nor out of time and tune approach! Nor fire nor meteor hurls a mightier bolt than Aphrodite's shaft shot by the hands of Love, the child of Zeus.

antistrophe 1

Idly, idly by the streams of Alpheus and in the Pythian shrines of Phoebus, Hellas heaps the slaughtered steers; while Love we worship not, Love, the king of men, who holds the key to Aphrodite's sweetest bower,—worship not him who, when he comes, lays waste and marks his path to mortal hearts by wide-spread woe.

strophe 2

There was that maiden [2] in Oechalia, a girl unwed, that knew no wooer yet nor married joys; her did the Queen of Love snatch from her home across the sea and gave unto Alcmena's son, mid blood and smoke and murderous marriage-hymns, to be to him a frantic fiend of hell; woe! woe for his wooing!

antistrophe 2

Ah! holy walls of Thebes, ah! fount of Dirce, ye could testify what course the love-queen follows. For with the blazing levin-bolt did she cut short the fatal marriage of Semele, mother of Zeus-born Bacchus. All things she doth inspire, dread goddess, winging her flight hither and thither like a bee.

PHAEDRA

Peace, oh women, peace! I am undone.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What, Phaedra, is this dread event within thy house?

PHAEDRA

Hush! let me hear what those within are saying.

LEADER

I am silent; this is surely the prelude to evil.

PHAEDRA (*chanting*)

Great gods! how awful are my sufferings!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What a cry was there! what loud alarm! say what sudden terror, lady, doth thy soul dismay.

PHAEDRA

I am undone. Stand here at the door and hear the noise arising in the house.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thou art already by the bolted door; 'tis for thee to note the sounds that issue from within. And tell me, O tell me what evil can be on foot.

PHAEDRA

'Tis the son of the horse-loving Amazon who calls, Hippolytus, uttering foul curses on my servant.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I hear a noise, but cannot clearly tell which way it comes. Ah! 'tis through the door the sound reached thee.

PHAEDRA

Yes, yes, he is calling her plainly enough a go-between in vice, traitress to her master's honour.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe, woe is me! thou art betrayed, dear mistress! What counsel shall I give thee? thy secret is out; thou art utterly undone.

PHAEDRA

Ah me! ah me!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Betrayed by friends!

PHAEDRA

She hath ruined me by speaking of my misfortune; 'twas kindly meant, but an ill way to cure my malady.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O what wilt thou do now in thy cruel dilemma?

PHAEDRA

I only know one way, one cure for these my woes, and that is instant death.

(HIPPOLYTUS *bursts out of the palace, followed closely by the* NURSE.)

HIPPOLYTUS

O mother earth! O sun's unclouded orb! What words, unfit for any lips, have reached my ears!

NURSE

Peace, my son, lest some one hear thy outcry.

HIPPOLYTUS

I cannot hear such awful words and hold my peace.

NURSE

I do implore thee by thy fair right hand.

HIPPOLYTUS

Let go my hand, touch not my robe.

NURSE

O by thy knees I pray, destroy me not utterly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Why say this, if, as thou pretendest, thy lips are free from blame?

NURSE

My son, this is no story to be noised abroad.

HIPPOLYTUS

A virtuous tale grows fairer told to many.

NURSE

Never dishonour thy oath, my son.

HIPPOLYTUS

My tongue an oath did take, but not my heart.[3]

NURSE

My son, what wilt thou do? destroy thy friends?

HIPPOLYTUS

Friends indeed! the wicked are no friends of mine.

NURSE

O pardon me; to err is only human, child.

HIPPOLYTUS

Great Zeus, why didst thou, to man's sorrow, put woman, evil counterfeit, to dwell where shines the sun? If thou wert minded that the human race should multiply, it was not from women they should have drawn their stock, but in thy temples they should have paid gold or iron or ponderous bronze and bought a family, each man proportioned to his offering, and so in independence dwelt, from women free. But now as soon as ever we would bring this plague into our home we bring its fortune to the ground. 'Tis clear from this how great a curse a woman is; the very father, that begot and nurtured her, to rid him of the mischief, gives her a dower and packs her off; while the husband, who takes the noxious weed into his home, fondly decks his sorry idol in fine raiment and tricks her out in robes, squandering by degrees, unhappy wight! his house's wealth. For he is in this dilemma; say his marriage has brought him good connections, he is glad then to keep the wife he loathes; or, if he gets a good wife but useless kin, he tries to stifle the bad luck with the good. But it is easiest for him who has settled in his house as wife a mere cipher,[4] incapable from simplicity. I hate a clever woman; never may she set foot in *my* house who aims at knowing more than women need; for in these clever women Cypris implants a larger store of villainy, while the artless woman is by her shallow wit from levity debarred. No servant should ever have had access to a wife, but men should put to live with them beasts, which bite, not talk, in which case they could not speak to any one nor be answered back by them. But, as it is, the wicked in their chambers plot wickedness, and their servants carry it abroad. Even thus, vile wretch, thou cam'st to make me partner in an outrage on my father's honour; wherefore I must wash that stain away in running streams, dashing the water into my ears. How could I commit so foul a crime when by the very mention of it I feel myself polluted? Be well assured, woman, 'tis only my religious scruple saves thee. For had not I unawares been caught by an oath, 'fore heaven! I would not have refrained from telling all unto my father. But now I will from the house away, so long as Theseus is abroad, and will maintain strict silence. But, when my father comes, I will return and see how thou and thy mistress face him, and so shall I learn by experience the extent of thy audacity. Perdition seize you both! I can never satisfy my hate for women, no! not even though some say this is ever my theme, for of a truth they always are evil. So either let some one prove them chaste,[1] or let me still trample on them for ever.

(HIPPOLYTUS *departs in anger.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O the cruel, unhappy fate of women! What arts, what arguments have we, once we have made a slip, to loose by craft the tight-drawn knot?

PHAEDRA (*chanting*)

I have met my deserts. O earth, O light of day! How can I escape the stroke of fate? How my pangs conceal, kind friends? What god will appear to help me, what mortal to take my part or help me in unrighteousness? The present calamity of my life admits of no escape. Most hapless I of all my sex!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Alas, alas! the deed is done, thy servant's schemes have gone awry, my queen, and all is lost.

PHAEDRA (*to the* NURSE)

Accursed woman! traitress to thy friends! How hast thou ruined me! May Zeus, my ancestor, smite thee with his fiery bolt and uproot thee from thy place. Did I not foresee thy purpose, did I not bid thee keep silence on the very matter which is now my shame? But thou wouldst not be still; wherefore my fair name will not go with me to the tomb. But now I must another scheme devise. Yon youth, in the keenness of his fury, will tell his father of my sin, and the aged Pittheus of my state, and fill the world with stories to my shame. Perdition seize thee and every meddling fool who by dishonest means would serve unwilling friends!

NURSE

Mistress, thou may'st condemn the mischief I have done, for sorrow's sting o'ermasters thy judgment; yet can I answer thee in face of this, if thou wilt hear. 'Twas I who nurtured thee; I love thee still; but in my search for medicine to cure thy sickness I found what least I sought. Had I but succeeded, I had been counted wise, for the credit we get for wisdom is measured by our success.

PHAEDRA

Is it just, is it any satisfaction to me, that thou shouldst wound me first, then bandy words with me?

NURSE

We dwell on this too long; I was not wise, I own; but there are yet ways of escape from the trouble, my child.

PHAEDRA

Be dumb henceforth; evil was thy first advice to me, evil too thy attempted scheme. Begone and leave me, look to thyself; I will my own fortunes for the best arrange.

(*The* NURSE *goes into the palace.*)

Ye noble daughters of Troezen, grant me the only boon I crave; in silence bury what ye here have heard.

LEADER

By majestic Artemis, child of Zeus, I swear I will never divulge aught of thy sorrows.

PHAEDRA

'Tis well. But I, with all my thought, can but one way discover out of this calamity, that so I may secure my children's honour, and find myself some help as matters stand. For never, never will I bring shame upon my Cretan home, nor will I, to save one poor life, face Theseus after my disgrace.

LEADER

Art thou bent then on some cureless woe?

PHAEDRA

On death; the means thereto must I devise myself.

LEADER

Hush!

PHAEDRA

Do thou at least advise me well. For this very day shall I gladden Cypris, my destroyer, by yielding up my life, and shall own myself vanquished by cruel love. Yet shall my dying be another's curse, that he may learn not to exult at my misfortunes; but when he comes to share the self-same plague with me, he will take a lesson in wisdom.[1]

(PHAEDRA *enters the palace.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

O to be nestling 'neath some pathless cavern, there by god's creating hand to grow into a bird amid the wingèd tribes! Away would I soar to Adria's wave-beat shore and to the waters of Eridanus; where a father's hapless daughters in their grief for Phaethon distil into the glooming flood the amber brilliance of their tears.

antistrophe 1

And to the apple-bearing strand of those minstrels in the west I then would come, where ocean's lord no more to sailors grants a passage o'er the deep dark main, finding there the heaven's holy bound, upheld by Atlas, where water from ambrosial founts wells up beside the couch of Zeus inside his halls, and holy earth, the bounteous mother, causes joy to spring in heavenly breasts.

strophe 2

O white-winged bark, that o'er the booming ocean-wave didst bring my royal mistress from her happy home, to crown her queen 'mongst sorrow's brides! Surely evil omens from either port, at least from Crete, were with that ship, what time to glorious Athens it sped its way, and the crew made fast its twisted cable-ends upon the beach of Munychus, and on the land stept out.

antistrophe 2

Whence comes it that her heart is crushed, cruelly afflicted by Aphrodite with unholy love; so she by bitter grief o'erwhelmed will tie a noose within her bridal bower to fit it to her fair white neck, too modest for this hateful lot in life, prizing o'er all her name and fame, and striving thus to rid her soul of passion's sting.

(*The* NURSE *rushes out of the palace.*)

NURSE

Help! ho! To the rescue all who near the palace stand! She hath hung herself, our queen, the wife of Theseus.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Woe worth the day! the deed is done; our royal mistress is no more, dead she hangs in the dangling noose.

NURSE

Haste! some one bring a two-edged knife wherewith to cut the knot about her neck.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Friends, what shall we do? think you we should enter the house, and loose the queen from the tight-drawn noose?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Why should *we?* Are there not young servants here? To do too much is not a safe course in life.

NURSE

Lay out the hapless corpse, straighten the limbs. This was a bitter way to sit at home and keep my master's house!

(*She goes in.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She is dead, poor lady; 'tis this I hear. Already are they laying out the corpse.

(THESEUS *and his retinue have entered, unnoticed.*)

THESEUS

Women, can ye tell me what the uproar in the palace means? There came the sound of servants weeping bitterly to mine ear. None of my household deign to open wide the gates and give me glad welcome as a traveller from prophetic shrines. Hath aught befallen old Pittheus? No. Though he be well advanced in years, yet should I mourn, were he to quit this house.

LEADER

'Tis not against the old, Theseus, that fate, to strike thee, aims this blow; prepare thy sorrow for a younger corpse.

THESEUS

Woe is me! is it a child's life death robs me of?

LEADER

They live; but, cruellest news of all for thee, their mother is no more.

THESEUS

What! my wife dead? By what cruel stroke of chance?

LEADER

About her neck she tied the hangman's knot.

THESEUS

Had grief so chilled her blood? or what had befallen her?

LEADER

I know but this, for I am myself but now arrived at the house to mourn thy sorrows, O Theseus.

THESEUS

Woe is me! why have I crowned my head with woven garlands, when misfortune greets my embassage? Unbolt the doors, servants, loose their fastenings, that I may see the piteous sight, my wife, whose death is death to me.

(*The central doors of the palace open, disclosing the corpse.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe! woe is thee for thy piteous lot! thou hast done thyself a hurt deep enough to overthrow this family. Ah! ah! the daring of it! done to death by violence and unnatural means, the desperate effort of thy own poor hand! Who cast the shadow o'er thy life, poor lady?

THESEUS (*chanting*)

Ah me, my cruel lot! sorrow hath done her worst on me. O fortune, how heavily hast thou set thy foot on me and on my house, by fiendish hands inflicting an unexpected stain? Nay, 'tis complete effacement of my life, making it not to be lived; for I see, alas! so wide an ocean of grief that I can never swim to shore again, nor breast the tide of this calamity. How shall I speak of thee, my poor wife, what tale of direst suffering tell? Thou art vanished like a bird from the covert of my hand, taking one headlong leap from me to Hades' halls. Alas, and woe! this is a bitter, bitter sight! This must be a judgment sent by God for the sins of an ancestor, which from some far source I am bringing on myself.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

My prince, 'tis not to thee alone such sorrows come; thou hast lost a noble wife, but so have many others.

THESEUS (*chanting*)

Fain would I go hide me 'neath earth's blackest depth, to dwell in darkness with the dead in misery, now that I am reft of thy dear presence! for thou hast slain me than thyself e'en more. Who can tell me what caused the fatal stroke that reached thy heart, dear wife? Will no one tell me what befell? doth my palace all in vain give shelter to a herd of menials? Woe, woe for thee, my wife! sorrows past speech, past bearing, I behold within my house; myself a ruined man, my home a solitude, my children orphans!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Gone and left us hast thou, fondest wife and noblest of all women 'neath the sun's bright eye or night's star-lit radiance. Poor house, what sorrows are thy portion now! My eyes are wet with streams of tears to see thy fate; but the ill that is to follow has long with terror filled me.

THESEUS

Ha! what means this letter? clasped in her dear hand it hath some strange tale to tell. Hath she, poor lady, as a last request, written her bidding as to my marriage and her children? Take heart, poor ghost; no wife henceforth shall wed thy Theseus or invade his house. Ah! how yon

seal of my dead wife stamped with her golden ring affects my sight! Come, I will unfold the sealed packet and read her letter's message to me.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe unto us! Here is yet another evil in the train by heaven sent. Looking to what has happened, I should count my lot in life no longer worth one's while to gain. My master's house, alas! is ruined, brought to naught, I say. Spare it, O Heaven, if it may be. Hearken to my prayer, for I see, as with prophetic eye, an omen boding ill.

THESEUS

O horror! woe on woe! and still they come, too deep for words, too heavy to bear. Ah me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What is it? speak, if I may share in it.

THESEUS (*chanting*)

This letter loudly tells a hideous tale! where can I escape my load of woe? For I am ruined and undone, so awful are the words I find here written clear as if she cried them to me; woe is me!

LEADER

Alas! thy words declare themselves the harbingers of woe.

THESEUS

I can no longer keep the cursed tale within the portal of my lips, cruel though its utterance be. Ah me! Hippolytus hath dared by brutal force to violate my honour, recking naught of Zeus, whose awful eye is over all. O father Poseidon, once didst thou promise to fulfil three prayers of mine; answer one of these and slay my son, let him not escape this single day, if the prayers thou gavest me were indeed with issue fraught.

LEADER

O king, I do conjure thee, call back that prayer; hereafter thou wilt know thy error. Hear, I pray.

THESEUS

It cannot be! Moreover I will banish him from this land, and by one of two fates shall he be struck down; either Poseidon, out of respect to my prayer, will cast his dead body into the house of Hades; or exiled from this land, a wanderer to some foreign shore, shall he eke out a life of misery.

LEADER

Lo! where himself doth come, thy son Hippolytus, in good time; dismiss thy hurtful rage, King Theseus, and bethink thee what is best for thy house.

(HIPPOLYTUS *enters.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

I heard thy voice, father, and hasted to come hither; yet know I not the cause of thy present sorrow, but would fain learn of thee.

(*He sees* PHAEDRA'S *body.*)

Ha! what is this? thy wife is dead? 'Tis very strange; it was but now I left her; a moment since she looked upon the light. How came she thus? the manner of her death? this would I learn of thee, father. Art dumb? silence availeth not in trouble; nay, for the heart that fain would know all must show its curiosity even in sorrow's hour. Be sure it is not right, father, to hide misfortunes from those who love, ay, more than love thee.

THESEUS

O ye sons of men, victims of a thousand idle errors, why teach your countless crafts, why scheme and seek to find a way for everything, while one thing ye know not nor ever yet have made your prize, a way to teach them wisdom whose souls are void of sense?

HIPPOLYTUS

A very master in his craft the man, who can force fools to be wise! But these ill-timed subtleties of thine, father, make me fear thy tongue is running wild through trouble.

THESEUS

Fie upon thee! man needs should have some certain test set up to try his friends, some touchstone of their hearts, to know each friend whether he be true or false; all men should have two voices, one the voice of honesty, expediency's the other, so would honesty confute its knavish opposite, and then we could not be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS

Say, hath some friend been slandering me and hath he still thine ear? and I, though guiltless, banned? I am amazed, for thy random, frantic words fill me with wild alarm.

THESEUS

O the mind of mortal man! to what lengths will it proceed? What limit will its bold assurance have? for if it goes on growing as man's life advances, and each successor outdo the man before him in villainy, the gods will have to add another sphere unto the world, which shall take in

the knaves and villains. Behold this man; he, my own son, hath outraged mine honour, his guilt most clearly proved by my dead wife. Now, since thou hast dared this loathly crime, come, look thy father in the face. Art thou the man who dost with gods consort, as one above the vulgar herd? art thou the chaste [1] and sinless saint? Thy boasts will never persuade me to be guilty of attributing ignorance to gods. Go then, vaunt thyself, and drive thy petty trade in viands formed of lifeless food; [5] take Orpheus for thy chief and go a-revelling, with all honour for the vapourings of many a written scroll, seeing thou now art caught. Let all beware, I say, of such hypocrites! who hunt their prey with fine words, and all the while are scheming villainy. She is dead; dost think that this will save thee? Why this convicts thee more than all, abandoned wretch! What oaths, what pleas can outweigh this letter, so that thou shouldst 'scape thy doom? Thou wilt assert she hated thee, that 'twixt the bastard and the true-born child nature has herself put war; it seems then by thy showing she made a sorry bargain with her life, if to gratify her hate of thee she lost what most she prized. 'Tis said, no doubt, that frailty finds no place in man but is innate in woman; my experience is, young men are no more secure than women, whenso the Queen of Love excites a youthful breast; although their sex comes in to help them. Yet why do I thus bandy words with thee, when before me lies the corpse, to be the clearest witness? Begone at once, an exile from this land, and ne'er set foot again in god-built Athens nor in the confines of my dominion. For if I am tamely to submit to this treatment from such as thee, no more will Sinis, robber of the Isthmus, bear me witness how I slew him, but say my boasts are idle, nor will those rocks Scironian, that fringe the sea, call me the miscreants' scourge.

LEADER

I know not how to call happy any child of man; for that which was first has turned and now is last.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, thy wrath and the tension of thy mind are terrible; yet this charge, specious though its arguments appear, becomes a calumny, if one lay it bare. Small skill have I in speaking to a crowd, but have a readier wit for comrades of mine own age and small companies. Yea, and this is as it should be; for they, whom the wise despise, are better qualified to speak before a mob. Yet am I constrained under the present circumstances to break silence. And at the outset will I take the point which formed the basis of thy stealthy attack on me, designed to put me out of court unheard; dost see yon sun, this earth? These do not contain, for all thou dost deny it, chastity [1] surpassing mine. To reverence God I count the highest knowledge, and to adopt as friends not those who attempt in-

justice, but such as would blush to propose to their companions aught disgraceful or pleasure them by shameful services; to mock at friends is not my way, father, but I am still the same behind their backs as to their face. The very crime thou thinkest to catch me in, is just the one I am untainted with, for to this day have I kept me pure from women. Nor know I aught thereof, save what I hear or see in pictures, for I have no wish to look even on these, so pure my virgin soul. I grant my claim to chastity [1] may not convince thee; well, 'tis then for thee to show the way I was corrupted. Did this woman exceed in beauty all her sex? Did I aspire to fill the husband's place after thee and succeed to thy house? That surely would have made me out a fool, a creature void of sense. Thou wilt say, "Your chaste [1] man loves to lord it." No, no! say I, sovereignty pleases only those whose hearts are quite corrupt. Now, I would be the first and best at all the games in Hellas, but second in the state, for ever happy thus with the noblest for my friends. For there one may be happy, and the absence of danger gives a charm beyond all princely joys. One thing I have not said, the rest thou hast. Had I a witness to attest my purity, and were I pitted 'gainst her still alive, facts would show thee on enquiry who the culprit was. Now by Zeus, the god of oaths, and by the earth, whereon we stand, I swear to thee I never did lay hand upon thy wife nor would have wished to, or have harboured such a thought. Slay me, ye gods! rob me of name and honour, from home and city cast me forth, a wandering exile o'er the earth! nor sea nor land receive my bones when I am dead, if I am such a miscreant! I cannot say if she through fear destroyed herself, for more than this am I forbid. With her discretion took the place of chastity,[1] while I, though chaste, was not discreet in using this virtue.

LEADER

Thy oath by heaven, strong security, sufficiently refutes the charge.

THESEUS

A wizard or magician must the fellow be, to think he can first flout me, his father, then by coolness master my resolve.

HIPPOLYTUS

Father, thy part in this doth fill me with amaze; wert thou my son and I thy sire, by heaven! I would have slain, not let thee off with banishment, hadst thou presumed to violate my honour.

THESEUS

A just remark! yet shalt thou not die by the sentence thine own lips pronounce upon thyself; for death, that cometh in a moment, is an easy end for wretchedness. Nay, thou shalt be exiled from thy fatherland, and

wandering to a foreign shore drag out a life of misery; for such are the wages of sin.

HIPPOLYTUS

Oh! what wilt thou do? Wilt thou banish me, without so much as waiting for Time's evidence on my case?

THESEUS

Ay, beyond the sea, beyond the bounds of Atlas, if I could, so deeply do I hate thee.

HIPPOLYTUS

What! banish me untried, without even testing my oath, the pledge I offer, or the voice of seers?

THESEUS

This letter here, though it bears no seers' signs, arraigns thy pledges; as for birds that fly o'er our heads, a long farewell to them.

HIPPOLYTUS (*aside*)

Great gods! why do I not unlock my lips, seeing that I am ruined by you, the objects of my reverence? No, I will not; I should nowise persuade those whom I ought to, and in vain should break the oath I swore.

THESEUS

Fie upon thee! that solemn air of thine is more than I can bear. Begone from thy native land forthwith!

HIPPOLYTUS

Whither shall I turn? Ah me! whose friendly house will take me in, an exile on so grave a charge?

THESEUS

Seek one who loves to entertain as guests and partners in his crimes corrupters of men's wives.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah me! this wounds my heart and brings me nigh to tears to think that I should appear so vile, and thou believe me so.

THESEUS

Thy tears and forethought had been more in season when thou didst presume to outrage thy father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS

O house, I would thou couldst speak for me and witness if I am so vile!

THESEUS

Dost fly to speechless witnesses? This deed, though it speaketh not, proves thy guilt clearly.

HIPPOLYTUS

Alas! Would I could stand and face myself, so should I weep to see the sorrows I endure.

THESEUS

Ay, 'tis thy character to honour thyself far more than reverence thy parents, as thou shouldst.

HIPPOLYTUS

Unhappy mother! son of sorrow! Heaven keep all friends of mine from bastard birth!

THESEUS

Ho! servants, drag him hence! You heard my proclamation long ago condemning him to exile.

HIPPOLYTUS

Whoso of them doth lay a hand on me shall rue it; thyself expel me, if thy spirit move thee, from the land.

THESEUS

I will, unless my word thou straight obey; no pity for thy exile steals into my heart.

(THESEUS *goes in. The central doors of the palace are closed.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

The sentence then, it seems, is passed. Ah, misery! How well I know the truth herein, but know no way to tell it! O daughter of Latona, dearest to me of all deities, partner, comrade in the chase, far from glorious Athens must I fly. Farewell, city and land of Erechtheus; farewell, Troezen, most joyous home wherein to pass the spring of life; 'tis my last sight of thee, farewell! Come, my comrades in this land, young like me, greet me kindly and escort me forth, for never will ye behold a purer[1] soul, for all my father's doubts.

(HIPPOLYTUS *departs. Many follow him.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

In very deed the thoughts I have about the gods, whenso they come into my mind, do much to soothe its grief, but though I cherish secret hopes of some great guiding will, yet am I at fault when I survey the fate and doings of the sons of men; change succeeds to change, and man's life veers and shifts in endless restlessness.

antistrophe 1

Fortune grant me this, I pray, at heaven's hand,—a happy lot in life and a soul from sorrow free; opinions let me hold not too precise nor yet too hollw; but, lightly changing my habits to each morrow as it comes, may I thus attain a life of bliss!

strophe 2

For now no more is my mind free from doubts, unlooked-for sights greet my vision; for lo! I see the morning star of Athens, eye of Hellas, driven by his father's fury to another land. Mourn, ye sands of my native shores, ye oak-groves on the hills, where with his fleet hounds he would hunt the quarry to the death, attending on Dictynna, awful queen.

antistrophe 2

No more will he mount his car drawn by Venetian steeds, filling the course round Limna with the prancing of his trained horses. Nevermore in his father's house shall he wake the Muse that never slept beneath his lute-strings; no hand will crown the spots where rests the maiden Latona 'mid the boskage deep; nor evermore shall our virgins vie to win thy love, now thou art banished.

epode

While I with tears at thy unhappy fate shall endure a lot all undeserved. Ah! hapless mother, in vain didst thou bring forth, it seems. I am angered with the gods; out upon them! O ye linkèd Graces, why are ye sending from his native land this poor youth, a guiltless sufferer, far from his home?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But lo! I see a servant of Hippolytus hasting with troubled looks towards the palace.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Ladies, where may I find Theseus, king of the country? pray, tell me if ye know; is he within the palace here?

LEADER

Lo! himself approaches from the palace.

(THESEUS *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Theseus, I am the bearer of troublous tidings to thee and all citizens who dwell in Athens or the bounds of Troezen.

THESEUS

How now? hath some strange calamity o'ertaken these two neighbouring cities?

MESSENGER

In one brief word, Hippolytus is dead. 'Tis true one slender thread still links him to the light of life.

THESEUS

Who slew him? Did some husband come to blows with him, one whose wife, like mine, had suffered brutal violence?

MESSENGER

He perished through those steeds that drew his chariot, and through the curses thou didst utter, praying to thy sire, the ocean-king, to slay thy son.

THESEUS

Ye gods and king Poseidon, thou hast proved my parentage by hearkening to my prayer! Say how he perished; how fell the uplifted hand of Justice to smite the villain who dishonoured me?

MESSENGER

Hard by the wave-beat shore were we combing out his horses' manes, weeping the while, for one had come to say that Hippolytus was harshly exiled by thee and nevermore would return to set foot in this land. Then came he, telling the same doleful tale to us upon the beach, and with him was a countless throng of friends who followed after. At length he stayed his lamentation and spake: "Why weakly rave on this wise? My father's commands must be obeyed. Ho! servants, harness my horses to the chariot; this is no longer now city of mine." Thereupon each one of us bestirred himself, and, ere a man could say 'twas done, we had the horses standing ready at our master's side. Then he caught up the reins from the chariot-rail, first fitting his feet exactly in the hollows made for them. But first with outspread palms he called upon the gods, "O Zeus, now strike me dead, if I have sinned, and let my father learn how he is wronging me, in death at least, if not in life." Therewith he seized the whip and lashed each horse in turn; while we, close by his chariot, near the reins, kept up with him along the road that leads direct to Argos and Epidaurus. And just as we were coming to a desert spot, a strip of sand beyond the borders of this country, sloping right to the Saronic gulf,

there issued thence a deep rumbling sound, as it were an earthquake, a fearsome noise, and the horses reared their heads and pricked their ears, while we were filled with wild alarm to know whence came the sound; when, as we gazed toward the wave-beat shore, a wave tremendous we beheld towering to the skies, so that from our view the cliffs of Sciron vanished, for it hid the isthmus and the rock of Asclepius; then swelling and frothing with a crest of foam, the sea discharged it toward the beach where stood the harnessed car, and in the moment that it broke, that mighty wall of waters, there issued from the wave a monstrous bull, whose bellowing filled the land with fearsome echoes, a sight too awful as it seemed to us who witnessed it. A panic seized the horses there and then, but our master, to horses' ways quite used, gripped in both hands his reins, and tying them to his body pulled them backward as the sailor pulls his oar; but the horses gnashed the forged bits between their teeth and bore him wildly on, regardless of their master's guiding hand or rein or jointed car. And oft as he would take the guiding rein and steer for softer ground, showed that bull in front to turn him back again, maddening his team with terror; but if in their frantic career they ran towards the rocks, he would draw nigh the chariot-rail, keeping up with them, until, suddenly dashing the wheel against a stone, he upset and wrecked the car; then was dire confusion, axle-boxes and linchpins springing into the air. While he, poor youth, entangled in the reins was dragged along, bound by a stubborn knot, his poor head dashed against the rocks, his flesh all torn, the while he cried out piteously, "Stay, stay, my horses whom my own hand hath fed at the manger, destroy me not utterly. O luckless curse of a father! Will no one come and save me for all my virtue?" Now we, though much we longed to help, were left far behind. At last, I know not how, he broke loose from the shapely reins that bound him, a faint breath of life still in him; but the horses disappeared, and that portentous bull, among the rocky ground, I know not where. I am but a slave in thy house, 'tis true, O king, yet will I never believe so monstrous a charge against thy son's character, no! not though the whole race of womankind should hang itself, or one should fill with writing every pine-tree tablet grown on Ida, sure as I am of his uprightness.

LEADER

Alas! new troubles come to plague us, nor is there any escape from fate and necessity.

THESEUS

My hatred for him who hath thus suffered made me glad at thy tidings, yet from regard for the gods and him, because he is my son, I feel neither joy nor sorrow at his sufferings.

MESSENGER

But say, are we to bring the victim hither, or how are we to fulfil thy wishes? Bethink thee; if by me thou wilt be schooled, thou wilt not harshly treat thy son in his sad plight.

THESEUS

Bring him hither, that when I see him face to face, who hath denied having polluted my wife's honour, I may by words and heaven's visitation convict him.

(*The* MESSENGER *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ah! Cypris, thine the hand that guides the stubborn hearts of gods and men; thine, and that attendant boy's, who, with painted plumage gay, flutters round his victims on lightning wing. O'er the land and booming deep on golden pinion borne flits the god of Love, maddening the heart and beguiling the senses of all whom he attacks, savage whelps on mountains bred, ocean's monsters, creatures of this sun-warmed earth, and man; thine, O Cypris, thine alone the sovereign power to rule them all.

(ARTEMIS *appears above.*)

ARTEMIS (*chanting*)

Hearken, I bid thee, noble son of Aegeus: lo! 'tis I, Latona's child, that speak, I, Artemis. Why, Theseus, to thy sorrow dost thou rejoice at these tidings, seeing that thou hast slain thy son most impiously, listening to a charge not clearly proved, but falsely sworn to by thy wife? though clearly has the curse therefrom upon thee fallen. Why dost thou not for very shame hide beneath the dark places of the earth, or change thy human life and soar on wings to escape this tribulation? 'Mongst men of honour thou hast now no share in life.

(*She now speaks.*)

Hearken, Theseus; I will put thy wretched case. Yet will it naught avail thee, if I do, but vex thy heart; still with this intent I came, to show thy son's pure heart,—that he may die with honour,—as well the frenzy and, in a sense, the nobleness of thy wife; for she was cruelly stung with a passion for thy son by that goddess whom all we, that joy in virgin purity, detest. And though she strove to conquer love by resolution, yet by no fault of hers she fell, thanks to her nurse's strategy, who did reveal her malady unto thy son under oath. But he would none of her counsels, as indeed was right, nor yet, when thou didst revile him, would he break the oath he swore, from piety. She meantime, fearful of

being found out, wrote a lying letter, destroying by guile thy son, but yet persuading thee.

THESEUS

Woe is me!

ARTEMIS

Doth my story wound thee, Theseus? Be still awhile; hear what follows, so wilt thou have more cause to groan. Dost remember those three prayers thy father granted thee, fraught with certain issue? 'Tis one of these thou hast misused, unnatural wretch, against thy son, instead of aiming it at an enemy. Thy sea-god sire, 'tis true, for all his kind intent, hath granted that boon he was compelled, by reason of his promise, to grant. But thou alike in his eyes and in mine hast shewn thy evil heart, in that thou hast forestalled all proof or voice prophetic, hast made no inquiry, nor taken time for consideration, but with undue haste cursed thy son even to the death.

THESEUS

Perdition seize me! Queen revered!

ARTEMIS

An awful deed was thine, but still even for this thou mayest obtain pardon; for it was Cypris that would have it so, sating the fury of her soul. For this is law amongst us gods; none of us will thwart his neighbour's will, but ever we stand aloof. For be well assured, did I not fear Zeus, never would I have incurred the bitter shame of handing over to death a man of all his kind to me most dear. As for thy sin, first thy ignorance absolves thee from its villainy, next thy wife, who is dead, was lavish in her use of convincing arguments to influence thy mind. On thee in chief this storm of woe hath burst, yet is it some grief to me as well; for when the righteous die, there is no joy in heaven, albeit we try to destroy the wicked, house and home.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Lo! where he comes, this hapless youth, his fair young flesh and auburn locks most shamefully handled. Unhappy house! what twofold sorrow doth o'ertake its halls, through heaven's ordinance!

(HIPPOLYTUS *enters, assisted by his attendants.*)

HIPPOLYTUS (*chanting*)

Ah! ah! woe is me! foully undone by an impious father's impious imprecation! Undone, undone! woe is me! Through my head dart fearful pains; my brain throbs convulsively. Stop, let me rest my worn-out frame. Oh, oh! Accursed steeds, that mine own hand did

feed, ye have been my ruin and my death. O by the gods, good sirs, I beseech ye, softly touch my wounded limbs. Who stands there at my right side? Lift me tenderly; with slow and even step conduct a poor wretch cursed by his mistaken sire. Great Zeus, dost thou see this? Me thy reverent worshipper, me who left all men behind in purity,[1] plunged thus into yawning Hades 'neath the earth, reft of life; in vain the toils I have endured through my piety towards mankind. Ah me! ah me! O the thrill of anguish shooting through me! Set me down, poor wretch I am; come Death to set me free! Kill me, end my sufferings. O for a sword two-edged to hack my flesh, and close this mortal life! Ill-fated curse of my father! the crimes of bloody kinsmen, ancestors of old, now pass their boundaries and tarry not, and upon me are they come all guiltless as I am; ah! why? Alas, alas! what can I say? How from my life get rid of this relentless agony? O that the stern Death-god, night's black visitant, would give my sufferings rest!

ARTEMIS

Poor sufferer! cruel the fate that links thee to it! Thy noble soul hath been thy ruin.

HIPPOLYTUS

Ah! the fragrance from my goddess wafted! Even in my agony I feel thee near and find relief; she is here in this very place, my goddess Artemis.

ARTEMIS

She is, poor sufferer! the goddess thou hast loved the best.

HIPPOLYTUS

Dost see me, mistress mine? dost see my present suffering?

ARTEMIS

I see thee, but mine eyes no tear may weep.

HIPPOLYTUS

Thou hast none now to lead the hunt or tend thy fane.

ARTEMIS

None now; yet e'en in death I love thee still.

HIPPOLYTUS

None to groom thy steeds, or guard thy shrines.

ARTEMIS

'Twas Cypris, mistress of iniquity, devised this evil.

HIPPOLYTUS
Ah me! now know I the goddess who destroyed me.

ARTEMIS
She was jealous of her slighted honour, vexed at thy chaste life.[1]

HIPPOLYTUS
Ah! then I see her single hand hath struck down three of us.

ARTEMIS
Thy sire and thee, and last thy father's wife.

HIPPOLYTUS
My sire's ill-luck as well as mine I mourn.

ARTEMIS
He was deceived by a goddess's design.

HIPPOLYTUS
Woe is thee, my father, in this sad mischance!

THESEUS
My son, I am a ruined man; life has no joys for me.

HIPPOLYTUS
For this mistake I mourn thee rather than myself.

THESEUS
O that I had died for thee, my son!

HIPPOLYTUS
Ah! those fatal gifts thy sire Poseidon gave.

THESEUS
Would God these lips had never uttered that prayer!

HIPPOLYTUS
Why not? thou wouldst in any case have slain me in thy fury then.

THESEUS
Yes; Heaven had perverted my power to think.

HIPPOLYTUS
O that the race of men could bring a curse upon the gods!

ARTEMIS
Enough! for though thou pass to gloom beneath the earth, the wrath of Cypris shall not, at her will, fall on thee unrequited, because thou hadst

a noble righteous soul. For I with mine own hand will with these unerring shafts avenge me on another,[6] who is her votary, dearest to her of all the sons of men. And to thee, poor sufferer, for thy anguish now will I grant high honours in the city of Troezen; for thee shall maids unwed before their marriage cut off their hair, thy harvest through the long roll of time of countless bitter tears. Yea, and for ever shall the virgin choir hymn thy sad memory, nor shall Phaedra's love for thee fall into oblivion and pass away unnoticed. But thou, O son of old Aegeus, take thy son in thine arms, draw him close to thee, for unwittingly thou slewest him, and men may well commit an error when gods put it in their way. And thee Hippolytus, I admonish; hate not thy sire, for in this death thou dost but meet thy destined fate. And now farewell! 'tis not for me to gaze upon the dead, or pollute my sight with death-scenes, and e'en now I see thee nigh that evil.

(ARTEMIS *vanishes.*)

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, blest virgin queen! leave me now! Easily thou resignest our long friendship! I am reconciled with my father at thy desire, yea, for ever before I would obey thy bidding. Ah me! the darkness is settling even now upon my eyes. Take me, father, in thy arms, lift me up.

THESEUS

Woe is me, my son! what art thou doing to me thy hapless sire!

HIPPOLYTUS

I am a broken man; yes, I see the gates that close upon the dead.

THESEUS

Canst leave me thus with murder on my soul!

HIPPOLYTUS

No, no; I set thee free from this bloodguiltiness.

THESEUS

What sayest thou? dost absolve me from bloodshed?

HIPPOLYTUS

Artemis, the archer-queen, is my witness that I do.

THESEUS

My own dear child, how generous dost thou show thyself to thy father!

HIPPOLYTUS

Farewell, dear father! a long farewell to thee!

THESEUS

O that holy, noble soul of thine!

HIPPOLYTUS

Pray to have children such as me born in lawful wedlock.

THESEUS

O leave me not, my son; endure awhile.

HIPPOLYTUS

'Tis finished, my endurance; I die, father; quickly veil my face with a mantle.

THESEUS

O glorious Athens, realm of Pallas, what a splendid hero ye have lost! Ah me, ah me! How oft shall I remember thy evil works, O Cypris!

CHORUS (*singing*)

On all our citizens hath come this universal sorrow, unforeseen. Now shall the copious tear gush forth, for sad news about great men takes more than usual hold upon the heart.

NOTES FOR HIPPOLYTUS

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 40, 95, 163–164, 278, 467, 636, 788, 801, 821, 855, 893, 901, 905–906, 924, 934, 1351, 1441, 1458.

1. All the words with which this note is keyed are Coleridge's renderings of the same Greek word in the original, *sophrosyne,* either in the nominal, adjectival, or verbal form. It appears so frequently in the Greek text at important points that it comes to be a conception central to the meaning of the whole play. In a sense Euripides is endeavouring to make clear what real *sophrosyne* actually is. It is impossible to find a single English word which will carry its entire meaning. Coleridge's usual renderings, "chastity" or "purity" must be supplemented by the connotations of self-restraint, moderation, temperance and self-control.

2. This refers to the story of Heracles and Iole. Cf. Sophocles, *The Trachiniae.*

3. Cf. Aristophanes *Frogs,* lines 101–102, and 1471.

4. Cf. note on line 638 in J. E. Harry's edition of the *Hippolytus.*

5. Theseus is taunting Hippolytus for being associated with the Orphic mysteries.

6. This refers to Adonis.

IV
HECUBA

Characters in the Play

The Ghost of Polydorus, *son of* Hecuba *and Priam, King of Troy*
Hecuba, *wife of Priam*
Chorus of Captive Trojan Women
Polyxena, *daughter of* Hecuba *and Priam*
Odysseus
Talthybius, *herald of* Agamemnon
Maid of Hecuba
Agamemnon
Polymestor, *King of the Thracian Chersonese*
Children of Polymestor, *Attendants, and guards*

INTRODUCTION

THE date when Euripides presented his *Hecuba* is not precisely known. Available evidence indicates that it was produced about the year 425 B.C., some three or four years after the appearance of the *Hippolytus*. The play is the first of those now extant wherein the poet turns to the legends of the Trojan War for his material. He chooses as his central figure, Hecuba, the queen of the fallen city. She is now the slave of Agamemnon, leader of the conquering Greek host which, as the play opens, is on the point of sailing home. Although the *Hecuba* is often regarded as the first of Euripides' series of "war plays," the high point of which is, of course, the pageant-like *Trojan Women*, the emphasis in the play is less upon the horrors of war as they are manifested in the character of Hecuba, than upon the psychological analysis of the character and its reaction to manifold sufferings, which only in part derive from war.

The *Hecuba* is sharply divided into two parts. The first deals with the sacrifice of Polyxena, daughter of the queen, whom the Greeks have cruelly voted to slay in order to appease and honour the spirit of Achilles. The second part reveals Hecuba as she exacts her vengeance from the king of Thrace, Polymestor, to whom she had entrusted her young son, Polydorus, for safe keeping during the course of the war. Polymestor, when the war ended, treacherously killed the youth to gain the sum of money which had been given him to hold in trust when he accepted the guardianship. Hecuba, by chance, discovers Polydorus' death, and then takes steps towards her revenge. The two sections of the play are integrated through the medium of Hecuba's character, and only by this means does the poet manage to achieve a requisite degree of artistic unity for his piece.

In the first half of the play, Hecuba, comforted by the fact that she has two children left, Polyxena and Polydorus, endures the ghastly experience of seeing her daughter carried off to death. She is strengthened by the calm courage displayed by Polyxena, who with nobility and dignity goes forth to meet her doom. Surely one of the finest passages in Euripides is the speech of Talthybius, the Greek herald, describing how she died. In the latter section, the discovery of the death of Polydorus hardens Hecuba into cold-blooded unemotional bitterness. She revenges herself on Poly-

mestor with horrible ferocity, yet the effect of this half of the play, as critics generally hold, is marred by the almost formal debate carried on between Hecuba and Polymestor before Agamemnon, who is acting in the rôle of judge. Despite this defect, the delineation of Hecuba is notable, and the poet has portrayed her effectively as she passes from a state of abject despair into one of cold fury.

HECUBA

(SCENE:—*Before* AGAMEMNON'S *tent in the Greek camp upon the shore of the Thracian Chersonese. The* GHOST OF POLYDORUS *appears.*)

GHOST

Lo! I AM come from out the charnel-house and gates of gloom, where Hades dwells apart from gods, I Polydorus, a son of Hecuba the daughter of Cisseus and of Priam. Now my father, when Phrygia's capital was threatened with destruction by the spear of Hellas, took alarm and conveyed me secretly from the land of Troy unto Polymestor's house, his friend in Thrace, who sows these fruitful plains of Chersonese, curbing by his might a nation delighting in horses. And with me my father sent great store of gold by stealth, that, if ever Ilium's walls should fall, his children that survived might not want for means to live. I was the youngest of Priam's sons; and this it was that caused my stealthy removal from the land; for my childish arm availed not to carry weapons or to wield the spear. So long then as the bulwarks of our land stood firm, and Troy's battlements abode unshaken, and my brother Hector prospered in his warring, I, poor child, grew up and flourished, like some vigorous shoot, at the court of the Thracian, my father's friend. But when Troy fell and Hector lost his life and my father's hearth was rooted up, and himself fell butchered at the god-built altar by the hands of Achilles' murderous son; then did my father's friend slay me his helpless guest for the sake of the gold, and thereafter cast me into the swell of the sea, to keep the gold for himself in his house. And there I lie one time upon the strand, another in the salt sea's surge, drifting ever up and down upon the billows, unwept, unburied; but now am I hovering o'er the head of my dear mother Hecuba, a disembodied spirit, keeping my airy station these three days, ever since my poor mother came from Troy to linger here in Chersonese. Meantime all the Achaeans sit idly here in their ships at the shores of Thrace; for the son of Peleus, even Achilles, appeared above his tomb and stayed the whole host of Hellas, as they were making straight for home across the sea, demanding to have my sister Polyxena offered at his tomb, and to receive his guerdon. And he will obtain this

prize, nor will they that are his friends refuse the gift; and on this very day is fate leading my sister to her doom. So will my mother see two children dead at once, me and that ill-fated maid. For I, to win a grave, ah me! will appear amid the rippling waves before her bond-maid's feet. Yes! I have won this boon from the powers below, that I should find a tomb and fall into my mother's hands; so shall I get my heart's desire; wherefore I will go and waylay aged Hecuba, for yonder she passeth on her way from the shelter of Agamemnon's tent, terrified at my spectre. Woe is thee! ah, mother mine! from a palace dragged to face a life of slavery! how sad thy lot, as sad as once 'twas blest! Some god is now destroying thee, setting this in the balance to outweigh thy former bliss.

(*The* GHOST *vanishes.* HECUBA *enters from the tent of* AGAMEMNON, *supported by her attendants, captive Trojan women.*)

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Guide these aged steps, my servants, forth before the house; support your fellow-slave, your queen of yore, ye maids of Troy. Take hold upon my aged hand, support me, guide me, lift me up; and I will lean upon your bended arm as on a staff and quicken my halting footsteps onwards. O dazzling light of Zeus! O gloom of night! why am I thus scared by fearful visions of the night? O earth, dread queen, mother of dreams that flit on sable wings! I am seeking to avert the vision of the night, the sight of horror which I saw so clearly in my dreams touching my son, who is safe in Thrace, and Polyxena my daughter dear. Ye gods of this land! preserve my son, the last and only anchor of my house, now settled in Thrace, the land of snow, safe in the keeping of his father's friend. Some fresh disaster is in store, a new strain of sorrow will be added to our woe. Such ceaseless thrills of terror never wrung my heart before. Oh! where, ye Trojan maidens, can I find inspired Helenus or Cassandra, that they may read me my dream? For I saw a dappled hind mangled by a wolf's bloody fangs, torn from my knees by force in piteous wise. And this too filled me with affright; o'er the summit of his tomb appeared Achilles' phantom, and for his guerdon he would have one of the luckless maids of Troy. Wherefore, I implore you, powers divine, avert this horror from my daughter, from my child.

(*The* CHORUS OF CAPTIVE TROJAN WOMEN *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Hecuba, I have hastened away to thee, leaving my master's tent, where the lot assigned me as his appointed slave, in the day that I was driven from the city of Ilium, hunted by Achaeans thence at the

point of the spear; no alleviation bring I for thy sufferings; nay, I have laden myself with heavy news, and am a herald of sorrow to thee, lady. 'Tis said the Achaeans have determined in full assembly to offer thy daughter in sacrifice to Achilles; for thou knowest how one day he appeared standing on his tomb in golden harness, and stayed the sea-borne barques, though they had their sails already hoisted, with this pealing cry, "Whither away so fast, ye Danai, leaving my tomb without its prize?" Thereon arose a violent dispute with stormy altercation, and opinion was divided in the warrior host of Hellas, some being in favour of offering the sacrifice at the tomb, others dissenting. There was Agamemnon, all eagerness in thy interest, because of his love for the frenzied prophetess; but the two sons of Theseus, scions of Athens, though supporting different proposals, yet agreed on the same decision, which was to crown Achilles' tomb with fresh-spilt blood; for they said they never would set Cassandra's love before Achilles' valour. Now the zeal of the rival disputants was almost equal, until that shifty, smooth-mouthed varlet, the son of Laertes, whose tongue is ever at the service of the mob, persuaded the army not to put aside the best of all the Danai for want of a bond-maid's sacrifice, nor have it said by any of the dead that stand beside Persephone, "The Danai have left the plains of Troy without one thought of gratitude for their brethren who died for Hellas." Odysseus will be here in an instant, to drag the tender maiden from thy breast and tear her from thy aged arms. To the temples, to the altars with thee! at Agamemnon's knees throw thyself as a suppliant! Invoke alike the gods in heaven and those beneath the earth. For either shall thy prayers avail to spare thee the loss of thy unhappy child, or thou must live to see thy daughter fall before the tomb, her crimson blood spurting in deep dark jets from her neck with gold encircled.

(*The following lines between* HECUBA *and* POLYXENA *are chanted responsively.*)

HECUBA

Woe, woe is me! What words, or cries, or lamentations can I utter? Ah me! for the sorrows of my closing years! for slavery too cruel to brook or bear! Woe, woe is me! What champion have I? Sons, and city—where are they? Aged Priam is no more; no more my children now. Which way am I to go, or this or that? Whither shall I turn my steps? Where is any god or power divine to succour me? Ah, Trojan maids! bringers of evil tidings! messengers of woe! ye have made an end, an utter end of me; life on earth has no more charm for me. Ah! luckless steps, lead on, guide your aged mistress to yon tent.

(*calling*) My child, come forth; come forth, thou daughter of the queen of sorrows; listen to thy mother's voice, my child, that thou mayst know the hideous rumour I now hear about thy life.

(POLYXENA *enters from the tent.*)

POLYXENA

O mother, mother mine! why dost thou call so loud? what news is it thou hast proclaimed, scaring me, like a cowering bird, from my chamber by this alarm?

HECUBA

Alas, my daughter!

POLYXENA

Why this ominous address? it bodeth sorrow for me.

HECUBA

Woe for thy life!

POLYXENA

Tell all, hide it no longer. Ah mother! how I dread, ay dread the import of thy loud laments.

HECUBA

Ah my daughter! a luckless mother's child!

POLYXENA

Why dost thou tell me this?

HECUBA

The Argives with one consent are eager for thy sacrifice to the son of Peleus at his tomb.

POLYXENA

Ah! mother mine! how canst thou speak of such a horror? Yet tell me all, yes all, O mother dear!

HECUBA

'Tis a rumour ill-boding I tell, my child; they bring me word that sentence is passed upon thy life by the Argives' vote.

POLYXENA

Alas, for thy cruel sufferings! my persecuted mother! woe for thy life of grief! What grievous outrage some fiend hath sent on thee, hateful, horrible! No more shall I thy daughter share thy bondage, hapless youth on hapless age attending. For thou, alas! wilt see thy hapless child torn from thy arms, as a calf of the hills is torn from

its mother, and sent beneath the darkness of the earth with severed throat for Hades, where with the dead shall I be laid, ah me! For thee I weep with plaintive wail, mother doomed to a life of sorrow! for my own life, its ruin and its outrage, never a tear I shed; nay, death is become to me a happier lot than life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

See where Odysseus comes in haste, to announce some fresh command to thee, Hecuba.

(ODYSSEUS *enters, with his attendants.*)

ODYSSEUS

Lady, methinks thou knowest already the intention of the host, and the vote that has been passed; still will I declare it. It is the Achaeans' will to sacrifice thy daughter Polyxena at the mound heaped o'er Achilles' grave; and they appoint me to take the maid and bring her thither, while the son of Achilles is chosen to preside o'er the sacrifice and act as priest. Dost know then what to do? Be not forcibly torn from her, nor match thy might 'gainst mine; recognize the limits of thy strength, and the presence of thy troubles. Even in adversity 'tis wise to yield to reason's dictates.

HECUBA

Ah me! an awful trial is nigh, it seems, fraught with mourning, rich in tears. Yes, I too escaped death where death had been my due, and Zeus destroyed me not but is still preserving my life, that I may witness in my misery fresh sorrows surpassing all before. Still if the bond may ask the free of things that grieve them not nor wrench their heart-strings, 'tis well that thou shouldst make an end and hearken to my questioning.

ODYSSEUS

Granted; put thy questions; that short delay I grudge thee not.

HECUBA

Dost remember the day thou camest to spy on Ilium, disguised in rags and tatters, while down thy cheek ran drops of blood? [1]

ODYSSEUS

Remember it! yes; 'twas no slight impression it made upon my heart.

HECUBA

Did Helen recognize thee and tell me only?

ODYSSEUS

I well remember the awful risk I ran.

HECUBA

Didst thou embrace my knees in all humility?

ODYSSEUS

Yea, so that my hand grew dead and cold upon thy robe.

HECUBA

What saidst thou then, when in my power?

ODYSSEUS

Doubtless I found plenty to say, to save my life.

HECUBA

Was it I that saved and sent thee forth again?

ODYSSEUS

Thou didst, and so I still behold the light of day.

HECUBA

Art not thou then playing a sorry part to plot against me thus, after the kind treatment thou didst by thy own confession receive from me, showing me no gratitude but all the ill thou canst? A thankless race! all ye who covet honour from the mob for your oratory. Oh that ye were unknown to me! ye who harm your friends and think no more of it, if ye can but say a word to win the mob. But tell me, what kind of cleverness did they think it, when against this child they passed their bloody vote? Was it duty led them to slay a human victim at the tomb, where sacrifice of oxen more befits? or does Achilles, if claiming the lives of those who slew him as his recompense, show his justice by marking her out for death? No! she at least ne'er injured him. He should have demanded Helen as a victim at his tomb, for she it was that proved his ruin, bringing him to Troy; or if some captive of surpassing beauty was to be singled out for doom, this pointed not to us; for the daughter of Tyndareus was fairer than all womankind, and her injury to him was proved no less than ours. Against the justice of his plea I pit this argument. Now hear the recompense due from thee to me at my request. On thy own confession, thou didst fall at my feet and embrace my hand and aged cheek; I in my turn now do the same to thee, and claim the favour then bestowed; and I implore thee, tear not my child from my arms, nor slay her. There be dead enough; she is my only joy, in her I forget my sorrows; my one comfort she in place of many a loss, my city and my nurse, my staff and journey's guide. 'Tis never right that those in power should use it out of season, or when prosperous suppose they will be always so. For I like them was prosperous once, but now my life is lived, and one day robbed me of all my bliss. Friend, by thy beard, have some regard and pity for me;

go to Achaea's host, and talk them over, saying how hateful a thing it is to slay women whom at first ye spared out of pity, after dragging them from the altars. For amongst you the self-same law holds good for bond and free alike respecting bloodshed; such influence as thine will persuade them even though thy words are weak; for the same argument, when proceeding from those of no account, has not the same force as when it is uttered by men of mark.

LEADER

Human nature is not so stony-hearted as to hear thy plaintive tale and catalogue of sorrows, without shedding a tear.

ODYSSEUS

O Hecuba! be schooled by me, nor in thy passion count him a foe who speaketh wisely. Thy life I am prepared to save, for the service I received; I say no otherwise. But what I said to all, I will not now deny, that after Troy's capture I would give thy daughter to the chiefest of our host because he asked a victim. For herein is a source of weakness to most states, whene'er a man of brave and generous soul receives no greater honour than his inferiors. Now Achilles, lady, deserves honour at our hands, since for Hellas he died as nobly as a mortal can. Is not this a foul reproach to treat a man as a friend in life, but, when he is gone from us, to treat him so no more? How now? what will they say, if once more there comes a gathering of the host and a contest with the foe? "Shall we fight or nurse our lives, seeing the dead have no honours?" For myself, indeed, though in life my daily store were scant, yet would it be all-sufficient, but as touching a tomb I should wish mine to be an object of respect, for this gratitude has long to run. Thou speakest of cruel sufferings; hear my answer. Amongst us are aged dames and grey old men no less miserable than thou, and brides of gallant husbands reft, o'er whom this Trojan dust has closed. Endure these sorrows; for us, if we are wrong in resolving to honour the brave, we shall bring upon ourselves a charge of ignorance; but as for you barbarians, regard not your friends as such and pay no homage to your gallant dead, that Hellas may prosper and ye may reap the fruits of such policy.

LEADER

Alas! how cursed is slavery alway in its nature, forced by the might of the stronger to endure unseemly treatment.

HECUBA

Daughter, my pleading to avert thy bloody death was wasted idly on the air; do thou, if in aught endowed with greater power to move than thy mother, make haste to use it, uttering every pleading note like the

tuneful nightingale, to save thy soul from death. Throw thyself at Odysseus' knees to move his pity, and try to move him. Here is thy plea: he too hath children, so that he can feel for thy sad fate.

POLYXENA

Odysseus, I see thee hiding thy right hand beneath thy robe and turning away thy face, that I may not touch thy beard. Take heart; thou art safe from the suppliant's god in my case, for I will follow thee, alike because I must and because it is my wish to die; for were I loth, a coward should I show myself, a woman faint of heart. Why should I prolong my days? I whose sire was king of all the Phrygians?—my chiefest pride in life. Then was I nursed on fair fond hopes to be a bride for kings, the centre of keen jealousy amongst suitors, to see whose home I would make my own; and o'er each dame of Ida I was queen; ah me! a maiden marked amid her fellows, equal to a goddess, save for death alone, but now a slave! That name first makes me long for death, so strange it sounds; and then maybe my lot might give me to some savage master, one that would buy me for money,—me the sister of Hector and many another chief,—who would make me knead him bread within his halls, or sweep his house or set me working at the loom, leading a life of misery; while some slave, bought I know not whence, will taint my maiden charms, once deemed worthy of royalty. No, never! Here I close my eyes upon the light, free as yet, and dedicate myself to Hades. Lead me hence, Odysseus, and do thy worst, for I see naught within my reach to make me hope or expect with any confidence that I am ever again to be happy. Mother mine! seek not to hinder me by word or deed, but join in my wish for death ere I meet with shameful treatment undeserved. For whoso is not used to taste of sorrow's cup, though he bears it, yet it galls him when he puts his neck within the yoke; far happier would he be dead than alive, for life of honour reft is toil and trouble.

LEADER

A wondrous mark, most clearly stamped, doth noble birth imprint on men, and the name goeth still further where it is deserved.

HECUBA

A noble speech, my daughter! but there is sorrow linked with its noble sentiments.

Odysseus, if ye must pleasure the son of Peleus, and avoid reproach, slay not this maid, but lead me to Achilles' pyre and torture me unsparingly; 'twas I that bore Paris, whose fatal shaft laid low the son of Thetis.

ODYSSEUS

'Tis not thy death, old dame, Achilles' wraith hath demanded of the Achaeans, but hers.

HECUBA

At least then slaughter me with my child; so shall there be a double draught of blood for the earth and the dead that claims this sacrifice.

ODYSSEUS

The maiden's death suffices; no need to add a second to the first; would we needed not e'en this!

HECUBA

Die with my daughter I must and will.

ODYSSEUS

How so? I did not know I had a master.

HECUBA

I will cling to her like ivy to an oak.

ODYSSEUS

Not if thou wilt hearken to those who are wiser than thyself.

HECUBA

Be sure I will never willingly relinquish my child.

ODYSSEUS

Well, be equally sure I will never go away and leave her here.

POLYXENA

Mother, hearken to me; and thou, son of Laertes, make allowance for a parent's natural wrath. My poor mother, fight not with our masters. Wilt thou be thrown down, be roughly thrust aside and wound thy aged skin, and in unseemly wise be torn from me by youthful arms? This wilt thou suffer; do not so, for 'tis not right for thee. Nay, dear mother mine! give me thy hand beloved, and let me press thy cheek to mine; for never, nevermore, but now for the last time shall I behold the dazzling sun-god's orb. My last farewells now take! O mother, mother mine! beneath the earth I pass.

HECUBA

O my daughter, I am still to live and be a slave.

POLYXENA

Unwedded I depart, never having tasted the married joys that were my due!

HECUBA

Thine, my daughter, is a piteous lot, and sad is mine also.

POLYXENA

There in Hades' courts shall I be laid apart from thee.

HECUBA

Ah me, what shall I do? where shall I end my life?

POLYXENA

Daughter of a free-born sire, a slave I am to die.

HECUBA

Not one of all my fifty children left!

POLYXENA

What message can I take for thee to Hector or thy aged lord?

HECUBA

Tell them that of all women I am the most miserable.

POLYXENA

Ah! bosom and breasts that fed me with sweet food!

HECUBA

Woe is thee, my child, for this untimely fate!

POLYXENA

Farewell, my mother! farewell, Cassandra!

HECUBA

"Fare well!" others do, but not thy mother, no!

POLYXENA

Thou too, my brother Polydorus, who art in Thrace, the home of steeds!

HECUBA

Aye, if he lives, which much I doubt; so luckless am I every way.

POLYXENA

Oh yes, he lives; and, when thou diest, he will close thine eyes.

HECUBA

I *am* dead; sorrow has forestalled death here.

POLYXENA

Come veil my head, Odysseus, and take me hence; for now, ere falls the fatal blow, my heart is melted by my mother's wailing, and hers no less by mine. O light of day! for still may I call thee by thy name, though now my share in thee is but the time I take to go 'twixt this and the sword at Achilles' tomb.

(ODYSSEUS *and his attendants lead* POLYXENA *away.*)

HECUBA

Woe is me! I faint; my limbs sink under me. O my daughter, embrace thy mother, stretch out thy hand, give it me again; leave me not childless! Ah, friends! 'tis my death-blow. Oh! to see that Spartan woman, Helen, sister of the sons of Zeus, in such a plight; for her bright eyes have caused the shameful fall of Troy's once prosperous town.

(HECUBA *sinks fainting to the ground.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O breeze from out the deep arising, that waftest swift galleys, ocean's coursers, across the surging main! whither wilt thou bear me the child of sorrow? To whose house shall I be brought, to be his slave and chattel? to some haven in the Dorian land, or in Phthia, where men say Apidanus, father of fairest streams, makes fat and rich the tilth?

antistrophe 1

or to an island home, sent on a voyage of misery by oars that sweep the brine, leading a wretched existence in halls where the first-created palm and the bay-tree put forth their sacred shoots for dear Latona, memorial fair of her divine travail? and there with the maids of Delos shall I hymn the golden snood and bow of Artemis their goddess?

strophe 2

Or in the city of Pallas, the home of Athena of the beauteous chariot, shall I upon her saffron robe yoke horses to the car, embroidering them on my web in brilliant varied shades, or the race of Titans, whom Zeus the son of Cronos lays to their unending sleep with bolt of flashing flame?

antistrophe 2

Woe is me for my children! woe for my ancestors, and my country which is falling in smouldering ruin 'mid the smoke, sacked by the Argive spear! while I upon a foreign shore am called a slave forsooth, leaving Asia, Europe's handmaid, and receiving in its place a deadly marriage-bower.

(*The herald,* TALTHYBIUS, *enters.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Where can I find Hecuba, who once was queen of Ilium, ye Trojan maidens?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

There she lies near thee, Talthybius, stretched full length upon the ground, wrapt in her robe.

TALTHYBIUS

Great Zeus! what can I say? that thine eye is over man? or that we hold this false opinion all to no purpose, thinking there is any race of gods, when it is chance that rules the mortal sphere? Was not this the queen of wealthy Phrygia, the wife of Priam highly blest? And now her city is utterly o'erthrown by the foe, and she, a slave in her old age, her children dead, lies stretched upon the ground, soiling her hair, poor lady! in the dust. Well, well; old as I am, may death be my lot before I am caught in any foul mischance. Arise, poor queen! lift up thyself and raise that hoary head.

HECUBA (*stirring*)

Ah! who art thou that wilt not let my body rest? why disturb me in my anguish, whosoe'er thou art?

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis I, Talthybius, who am here, the minister of the Danai; Agamemnon has sent me for thee, lady.

HECUBA (*rising*)

Good friend, art come because the Achaeans are resolved to slay me too at the grave? How welcome would thy tidings be! Let us hasten and lose no time; prithee, lead the way, old sir.

TALTHYBIUS

I am come to fetch thee to bury thy daughter's corpse, lady; and those that send me are the two sons of Atreus and the Achaean host.

HECUBA

Ah! what wilt thou say? Art thou not come, as I had thought, to fetch me to my doom, but to announce ill news? Lost, lost, my child! snatched from thy mother's arms! and I am childless now, at least as touches thee; ah, woe is me!

How did ye end her life? was any mercy shown? or did ye deal ruthlessly with her as though your victim were a foe, old man? Speak, though thy words must be pain to me.

TALTHYBIUS

Lady, thou art bent on making mine a double meed of tears in pity for thy child; for now too as I tell the sad tale a tear will wet my eye, as it did at the tomb when she was dying.

All Achaea's host was gathered there in full array before the tomb to see

thy daughter offered; and the son of Achilles took Polyxena by the hand and set her on the top of the mound, while I stood near; and a chosen band of young Achaeans followed to hold thy child and prevent her struggling. Then did Achilles' son take in his hands a brimming cup of gold and poured an offering to his dead sire, making a sign to me to proclaim silence throughout the Achaean host. So I stood at his side and in their midst proclaimed, "Silence, ye Achaeans! hushed be the people all! peace! be still!" Therewith I hushed the host. Then spake he, "Son of Peleus, father mine, accept the offering I pour thee to appease thy spirit, strong to raise the dead; and come to drink the black blood of a virgin pure, which I and the host are offering thee; oh! be propitious to us; grant that we may loose our prows and the cables of our ships, and, meeting with a prosperous voyage from Ilium, all to our country come." So he; and all the army echoed his prayer. Then seizing his golden sword by the hilt he drew it from its scabbard, signing the while to the picked young Argive warriors to hold the maid. But she, when she was ware thereof, uttered her voice and said: "O Argives, who have sacked my city! of my free will I die; let none lay hand on me; for bravely will I yield my neck. Leave me free, I do beseech; so slay me, that death may find me free; for to be called a slave amongst the dead fills my royal heart with shame." Thereat the people shouted their applause, and king Agamemnon bade the young men loose the maid. So they set her free, as soon as they heard this last command from him whose might was over all. And she, hearing her captors' words took her robe and tore it open from the shoulder to the waist, displaying a breast and bosom fair as a statue's; then sinking on her knee, one word she spake more piteous than all the rest, "Young prince, if 'tis my breast thou'dst strike, lo! here it is, strike home! or if at my neck thy sword thou'lt aim, behold! that neck is bared."

Then he, half glad, half sorry in his pity for the maid, cleft with the steel the channels of her breath, and streams of blood gushed forth; but she, e'en in death's agony, took good heed to fall with maiden grace, hiding from gaze of man what modest maiden must. Soon as she had breathed her last through the fatal gash, each Argive set his hand to different tasks, some strewing leaves o'er the corpse in handfuls, others bringing pine-logs and heaping up a pyre; and he, who brought nothing, would hear from him who did such taunts as these, "Stand'st thou still, ignoble wretch, with never a robe or ornament to bring for the maiden? Wilt thou give naught to her that showed such peerless bravery and spirit?"

Such is the tale I tell about thy daughter's death, and I regard thee as blest beyond all mothers in thy noble child, yet crossed in fortune more than all.

LEADER

Upon the race of Priam and my city some fearful curse hath burst; 'tis sent by God, and we must bear it.

HECUBA

O my daughter! 'mid this crowd of sorrows I know not where to turn my gaze; for if I set myself to one, another will not give me pause; while from this again a fresh grief summons me, finding a successor to sorrow's throne. No longer now can I efface from my mind the memory of thy sufferings sufficiently to stay my tears; yet hath the story of thy noble death taken from the keenness of my grief. Is it not then strange that poor land, when blessed by heaven with a lucky year, yields a good crop, while that which is good, if robbed of needful care, bears but little increase; yet 'mongst men the knave is never other than a knave, the good man aught but good, never changing for the worse because of misfortune, but ever the same? Is then the difference due to birth or bringing up? Good training doubtless gives lessons in good conduct, and if a man have mastered this, he knows what is base by the standard of good. Random shafts of my soul's shooting these, I know.

(*To* TALTHYBIUS) Go thou and proclaim to the Argives that they touch not my daughter's body but keep the crowd away. For when a countless host is gathered, the mob knows no restraint, and the unruliness of sailors exceeds that of fire, all abstinence from evil being counted evil.

(TALTHYBIUS *goes out.*)

(*Addressing a servant*) My aged handmaid, take a pitcher and dip it in the salt sea and bring hither thereof, that I for the last time may wash my child, a virgin wife, a widowed maid, and lay her out,—as she deserves, ah! whence can I? impossible! but as best I can; and what will that be? I will collect adornment from the captives, my companions in these tents, if haply any of them escaping her master's eye have some secret store from her old home.

(*The* MAID *departs.*)

O towering halls, O home so happy once, O Priam, rich in store of fairest wealth, most blest of sires, and I no less, the grey-haired mother of thy race, how are we brought to naught, stripped of our former pride! And spite of all we vaunt ourselves, one on the riches of his house, another because he has an honoured name amongst his fellow-citizens! But these things are naught; in vain are all our thoughtful schemes, in vain our vaunting words. He is happiest who meets no sorrow in his daily walk.

(HECUBA *enters the tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Woe and tribulation were made my lot in life, soon as ever Paris felled his beams of pine in Ida's woods, to sail across the heaving main in quest of Helen's hand, fairest bride on whom the sun-god turns his golden eye.

antistrophe

For here beginneth trouble's cycle, and, worse than that, relentless fate; and from one man's folly came a universal curse, bringing death to the land of Simois, with trouble from an alien shore. The strife the shepherd decided on Ida 'twixt three daughters of the blessed gods,

epode

brought as its result war and bloodshed and the ruin of my home; and many a Spartan maiden too is weeping bitter tears in her halls on the banks of fair Eurotas, and many a mother whose sons are slain, is smiting her hoary head and tearing her cheeks, making her nails red in the furrowed gash.

MAID

(*entering excitedly, attended by bearers bringing in a covered corpse*)

Oh! where, ladies, is Hecuba, our queen of sorrow, who far surpasses all in tribulation, men and women both alike? None shall wrest the crown from her.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

What now, thou wretched bird of boding note? Thy evil tidings never seem to rest.

MAID

'Tis to Hecuba I bring my bitter news; no easy task is it for mortal lips to speak smooth words in sorrow's hour.

LEADER

Lo! she is coming even now from the shelter of the tent, appearing just in time to hear thee speak.

(HECUBA *comes out of the tent.*)

MAID

Alas for thee! most hapless queen, ruined beyond all words of mine to tell; robbed of the light of life; of children, husband, city reft; hopelessly undone!

HECUBA

This is no news but insult; I have heard it all before. But why art thou come, bringing hither to me the corpse of Polyxena, on whose burial Achaea's host was reported to be busily engaged?

MAID (*aside*)

She little knows what I have to tell, but mourns Polyxena, not grasping her new sorrows.

HECUBA

Ah! woe is me! thou art not surely bringing hither mad Cassandra, the prophetic maid?

MAID

She lives, of whom thou speakest; but the dead thou dost not weep is here. (*Uncovering the corpse*) Mark well the body now laid bare; is not this a sight to fill thee with wonder, and upset thy hopes?

HECUBA

Ah me! 'tis the corpse of my son Polydorus I behold, whom he of Thrace was keeping safe for me in his halls. Alas! this is the end of all; my life is o'er.

(*Chanting*) O my son, my son, alas for thee! a frantic strain I now begin; thy fate I learnt, a moment gone, from some foul fiend.

MAID

What! so thou knewest thy son's fate, poor lady.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

I cannot, cannot credit this fresh sight I see. Woe succeeds to woe; time will never cease henceforth to bring me groans and tears.

LEADER

Alas! poor lady, our sufferings are cruel indeed.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

O my son, child of a luckless mother, what was the manner of thy death? what lays thee dead at my feet? Who did the deed?

MAID

I know not. On the sea-shore I found him.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Cast up on the smooth sand, or thrown there after the murderous blow?

MAID

The waves had washed him ashore.

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Alas! alas! I read aright the vision I saw in my sleep, nor did the phantom dusky-winged escape my ken, even the vision I saw concerning my son, who is now no more within the bright sunshine.

LEADER

Who slew him then? Can thy dream-lore tell us that?

HECUBA (*chanting*)

'Twas my own, own friend, the knight of Thrace, with whom his aged sire had placed the boy in hiding.

LEADER

O horror! what wilt thou say? did he slay him to get the gold?

HECUBA (*chanting*)

O awful crime! O deed without a name! beggaring wonder! impious! intolerable! Where are now the laws 'twixt guest and host? Accursed monster! how hast thou mangled his flesh, slashing the poor child's limbs with ruthless sword, lost to all sense of pity!

LEADER

Alas for thee! how some deity, whose hand is heavy on thee, hath sent thee troubles beyond all other mortals! But yonder I see our lord and master Agamemnon coming; so let us be still henceforth, my friends.

(AGAMEMNON *enters.*)

AGAMEMNON

Hecuba, why art thou delaying to come and bury thy daughter? for it was for this that Talthybius brought me thy message begging that none of the Argives should touch thy child. And so I granted this, and none is touching her, but this long delay of thine fills me with wonder. Wherefore am I come to send thee hence; for our part there is well performed; if herein there be any place for "well."

(*He sees the body.*)

Ha! what man is this I see near the tents, some Trojan's corpse? 'tis not an Argive's body; *that* the garments it is clad in tell me.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Unhappy one! in naming thee I name myself; O Hecuba, what shall I do? throw myself here at Agamemnon's knees, or bear my sorrows in silence?

AGAMEMNON

Why dost thou turn thy back towards me and weep, refusing to say what has happened, or who this is?

HECUBA (*aside*)

But should he count me as a slave and foe and spurn me from his knees, I should but add to my anguish.

AGAMEMNON

I am no prophet born; wherefore, if I be not told, I cannot learn the current of thy thoughts.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Can it be that in estimating this man's feelings I make him out too ill-disposed, when he is not really so?

AGAMEMNON

If thy wish really is that I should remain in ignorance, we are of one mind; for I have no wish myself to listen.

HECUBA (*aside*)

Without his aid I shall not be able to avenge my children. Why do I still ponder the matter? I must do and dare whether I win or lose. (*Turning to* AGAMEMNON) O Agamemnon! by thy knees, by thy beard and conquering hand I implore thee.

AGAMEMNON

What is thy desire? to be set free? that is easily done.

HECUBA

Not that; give me vengeance on the wicked, and evermore am I willing to lead a life of slavery.

AGAMEMNON

Well, but why dost thou call me to thy aid?

HECUBA

'Tis a matter thou little reckest of, O king. Dost see this corpse, for whom my tears now flow?

AGAMEMNON

I do; but what is to follow, I cannot guess.

HECUBA

He was my child in days gone by; I bore him in my womb.

AGAMEMNON
Which of thy sons is he, poor sufferer?

HECUBA
Not one of Priam's race who fell 'neath Ilium's walls.

AGAMEMNON
Hadst thou any son besides those, lady?

HECUBA
Yes, him thou seest here, of whom, methinks, I have small gain.

AGAMEMNON
Where then was he, when his city was being destroyed?

HECUBA
His father, fearful of his death, conveyed him out of Troy.

AGAMEMNON
Where did he place him apart from all the sons he then had?

HECUBA
Here in this very land, where his corpse was found.

AGAMEMNON
With Polymestor, the king of this country?

HECUBA
Hither was he sent in charge of gold, most bitter trust!

AGAMEMNON
By whom was he slain? what death o'ertook him?

HECUBA
By whom but by this man? His Thracian host slew him.

AGAMEMNON
The wretch! could he have been so eager for the treasure?

HECUBA
Even so; soon as ever he heard of the Phrygians' disaster.

AGAMEMNON
Where didst find him? or did some one bring his corpse?

HECUBA
This maid, who chanced upon it on the sea-shore.

AGAMEMNON

Was she seeking it, or bent on other tasks?

HECUBA

She had gone to fetch water from the sea to wash Polyxena.

AGAMEMNON

It seems then his host slew him and cast his body out to sea.

HECUBA

Aye, for the waves to toss, after mangling him thus.

AGAMEMNON

Woe is thee for thy measureless troubles!

HECUBA

I am ruined; no evil now is left, O Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON

Look you! what woman was ever born to such misfortune?

HECUBA

There is none, unless thou wouldst name misfortune herself. But hear my reason for throwing myself at thy knees. If my treatment seems to thee deserved, I will be content; but, if otherwise, help me to punish this most godless host, that hath wrought a deed most damned, fearless alike of gods in heaven or hell; who, though full oft he had shared my board and been counted first of all my guest-friends and after meeting with every kindness he could claim and receiving my consideration, slew my son, and bent though he was on murder, deigned not to bury him but cast his body forth to sea.

I may be a slave and weak as well, but the gods are strong, and custom too which prevails o'er them, for by custom it is that we believe in them and set up bounds of right and wrong for our lives. Now if this principle, when referred to thee, is to be set at naught, and they are to escape punishment who murder guests or dare to plunder the temples of gods, then is all fairness in things human at an end. Deem this then a disgrace and show regard for me, have pity on me, and, like an artist standing back from his picture, look on me and closely scan my piteous state. I was once a queen, but now I am thy slave; a happy mother once, but now childless and old alike, reft of city, utterly forlorn, the most wretched woman living. Ah! woe is me! whither wouldst thou withdraw thy steps from me? (*as* AGAMEMNON *is turning away*) My efforts then will be in vain, ah me! ah me! Why, oh! why do we mortals toil, as needs we must, and seek out all other sciences, but persuasion, the only real mistress of mankind,

we take no further pains to master completely by offering to pay for the knowledge, so that any man might upon occasion convince his fellows as he pleased and gain his point as well? [2] How shall anyone hereafter hope for prosperity? All those my sons are gone from me, and I, their mother, am led away into captivity to suffer shame, while yonder I see the smoke leaping up o'er my city. Further—though perhaps this were idly urged, to plead thy love, still will I put the case:—at thy side lies my daughter, Cassandra, the maid inspired, as the Phrygians call her. How then, O king, wilt thou acknowledge those nights of rapture, or what return shall she my daughter or I her mother have for all the love she has lavished on her lord? For from darkness and the endearments of the night mortals reap by far their keenest joys. Hearken then; dost see this corpse? By doing him a service thou wilt do it to a kinsman of thy bride's. One thing only have I yet to urge. Oh! would I had a voice in arms, in hands, in hair and feet, placed there by the arts of Daedalus or some god, that all together they might with tears embrace thy knees, bringing a thousand pleas to bear on thee! O my lord and master, most glorious light of Hellas, listen, stretch forth a helping hand to this aged woman, for all she is a thing of naught; still do so. For 'tis ever a good man's duty to succour the right, and to punish evil-doers wherever found.

LEADER

'Tis strange how each extreme doth meet in human life! Custom determines even our natural ties, making the most bitter foes friends, and regarding as foes those who formerly were friends.

AGAMEMNON

Hecuba, I feel compassion for thee and thy son and thy ill-fortune, as well as for thy suppliant gesture, and I would gladly see yon impious host pay thee this forfeit for the sake of heaven and justice, could I but find some way to help thee without appearing to the army to have plotted the death of the Thracian king for Cassandra's sake. For on one point I am assailed by perplexity; the army count this man their friend, the dead their foe; that he is dear to thee is a matter apart, wherein the army has no share. Reflect on this; for though thou find'st me ready to share thy toil and quick to lend my aid, yet the risk of being reproached by the Achaeans makes me hesitate.

HECUBA

Ah! there is not in the world a single man free; for he is either a slave to money or to fortune, or else the people in their thousands or the fear of public prosecution prevents him from following the dictates of his heart.

But since thou art afraid, deferring too much to the rabble, I will rid thee of that fear. Thus; be privy to my plot if I devise mischief against

this murderer, but refrain from any share in it. And if there break out among the Achaeans any uproar or attempt at rescue, when the Thracian is suffering his doom, check it, though without seeming to do so for my sake. For what remains, take heart; I will arrange everything well.

AGAMEMNON

How? what wilt thou do? wilt take a sword in thy old hand and slay the barbarian, or hast thou drugs or what to help thee? Who will take thy part? whence wilt thou procure friends?

HECUBA

Sheltered beneath these tents is a host of Trojan women.

AGAMEMNON

Dost mean the captives, the booty of the Hellenes?

HECUBA

With their help will I punish my murderous foe.

AGAMEMNON

How are women to master men?

HECUBA

Numbers are a fearful thing, and joined to craft a desperate foe.

AGAMEMNON

True; still I have a mean opinion of the female race.

HECUBA

What? did not women slay the sons of Aegyptus, and utterly clear Lemnos of men? But let it be even thus; put an end to our conference, and send this woman for me safely through the host. And do thou (*To a servant*) draw near my Thracian friend and say, "Hecuba, once queen of Ilium, summons thee, on thy own business no less than hers, thy children too, for they also must hear what she has to say." (*The servant goes out.*) Defer awhile, Agamemnon, the burial of Polyxena lately slain, that brother and sister may be laid on the same pyre and buried side by side, a double cause of sorrow to their mother.

AGAMEMNON

So shall it be; yet had the host been able to sail, I could not have granted thee this boon; but, as it is, since the god sends forth no favouring breeze, we needs must abide, seeing, as we do, that sailing cannot be. Good luck to thee! for this is the interest alike of citizen and state, that the wrong-doer be punished and the good man prosper.

(AGAMEMNON *departs as* HECUBA *withdraws into the tent.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

No more, my native Ilium, shalt thou be counted among the towns ne'er sacked; so thick a cloud of Hellene troops is settling all around, wasting thee with the spear; shorn art thou of thy coronal of towers, and fouled most piteously with filthy soot; no more, ah me! shall I tread thy streets.

antistrophe 1

'Twas in the middle of the night my ruin came, in the hour when sleep steals sweetly o'er the eyes after the feast is done. My husband, the music o'er, and the sacrifice that sets the dance afoot now ended, was lying in our bridal-chamber, his spear hung on a peg; with never a thought of the sailor-throng encamped upon the Trojan shores;

strophe 2

and I was braiding my tresses 'neath a tight-drawn snood before my golden mirror's countless rays, that I might lay me down to rest; when lo! through the city rose a din, and a cry went ringing down the streets of Troy, "Ye sons of Hellas, when, oh! when will ye sack the citadel of Ilium, and seek your homes?"

antistrophe 2

Up sprang I from my bed, with only a mantle about me, like a Dorian maid, and sought in vain, ah me! to station myself at the holy hearth of Artemis; for, after seeing my husband slain, I was hurried away o'er the broad sea; with many a backward look at my city, when the ship began her homeward voyage and parted me from Ilium's strand; till alas! for very grief I fainted,

epode

cursing Helen the sister of the Dioscuri, and Paris the baleful shepherd of Ida; for 'twas their marriage, which was no marriage but a curse by some demon sent, that robbed me of my country and drove me from my home. Oh! may the sea's salt flood ne'er carry her home again; and may she never set foot in her father's halls!

(HECUBA *comes out of the tent as* POLYMESTOR, *his children and guards enter.*)

POLYMESTOR

My dear friend Priam, and thou no less, Hecuba, I weep to see thee and thy city thus, and thy daughter lately slain. Alas! there is naught to be relied on; fair fame is insecure, nor is there any guarantee that weal will

not be turned to woe. For the gods confound our fortunes, tossing them to and fro, and introduce confusion, that our perplexity may make us worship them. But what boots it to bemoan these things, when it brings one no nearer to heading the trouble? If thou art blaming me at all for my absence, stay a moment; I was away in the very heart of Thrace when thou wast brought hither; but on my return, just as I was starting from my home for the same purpose, thy maid fell in with me, and gave me thy message, which brought me here at once.

HECUBA

Polymestor, I am holden in such wretched plight that I blush to meet thine eye; for my present evil case makes me ashamed to face thee who didst see me in happier days, and I cannot look on thee with unfaltering gaze. Do not then think it ill-will on my part, Polymestor; there is another cause as well, I mean the custom which forbids women to meet men's gaze.

POLYMESTOR

No wonder, surely. But what need hast thou of me? Why didst send for me to come hither from my house?

HECUBA

I wish to tell thee and thy children a private matter of my own; prithee, bid thy attendants withdraw from the tent.

POLYMESTOR (*to his Attendants*)

Retire; this desert spot is safe enough. (*The guards go out; to* HECUBA) Thou art my friend, and this Achaean host is well-disposed to me. But thou must tell me how prosperity is to succour its unlucky friends; for ready am I to do so.

HECUBA

First tell me of the child Polydorus, whom thou art keeping in thy halls, received from me and his father; is he yet alive? The rest will I ask thee after that.

POLYMESTOR

Yes, thou still hast a share in fortune there.

HECUBA

Well said, dear friend! how worthy of thee!

POLYMESTOR

What next wouldst learn of me?

HECUBA
Hath he any recollection of me his mother?

POLYMESTOR
Aye, he was longing to steal away hither to thee.

HECUBA
Is the gold safe, which he brought with him from Troy?

POLYMESTOR
Safe under lock and key in my halls.

HECUBA
There keep it, but covet not thy neighbour's goods.

POLYMESTOR
Not I; God grant me luck of what I have, lady!

HECUBA
Dost know what I wish to say to thee and thy children?

POLYMESTOR
Not yet; thy words maybe will declare it.

HECUBA
May it grow as dear to thee as thou now art to me!

POLYMESTOR
What is it that I and my children are to learn?

HECUBA
There be ancient vaults filled full of gold by Priam's line.

POLYMESTOR
Is it this thou wouldst tell thy son?

HECUBA
Yes, by thy lips, for thou art a righteous man.

POLYMESTOR
What need then of these children's presence?

HECUBA
'Tis better they should know it, in case of thy death.

POLYMESTOR
True; 'tis also the wiser way.

HECUBA

Well, dost thou know where stands the shrine of Trojan Athena?

POLYMESTOR

Is the gold there? what is there to mark it?

HECUBA

A black rock rising above the ground.

POLYMESTOR

Is there aught else thou wouldst tell me about the place?

HECUBA

I wish to keep safe the treasure I brought from Troy.

POLYMESTOR

Where can it be? inside thy dress, or hast thou it hidden?

HECUBA

'Tis safe amid a heap of spoils within these tents.

POLYMESTOR

Where? This is the station built by the Achaeans to surround their fleet.

HECUBA

The captive women have huts of their own.

POLYMESTOR

It is safe to enter? are there no men about?

HECUBA

There are no Achaeans within; we are alone. Enter then the tent, for the Argives are eager to set sail from Troy for home; and, when thou hast accomplished all that is appointed thee, thou shalt return with thy children to that bourn where thou hast lodged my son.

(HECUBA *leads* POLYMESTOR *and his children into the tent.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Not yet hast thou paid the penalty, but maybe thou yet wilt; like one who slips and falls into the surge with no haven near, so shalt thou lose thy own life for the life thou hast taken. For where the rights of justice and the law of heaven are one, there is ruin fraught with death and doom. Thy hopes of this journey shall cheat thee, for it hath led thee, unhappy wretch! to the halls of death; and to no warrior's hand shalt thou resign thy life.

POLYMESTOR (*within the tent*)
O horror! I am blinded of the light of my eyes, ah me!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS
Heard ye, friends, that Thracian's cry of woe?

POLYMESTOR (*within*)
O horror! horror! my children! O the cruel blow.

LEADER
Friends, new ills are brought to pass in yonder tent.

POLYMESTOR (*within*)
Nay, ye shall never escape for all your hurried flight; for with my fist will I burst open the inmost recesses of this hall.

LEADER
Hark! how he launches ponderous blows! Shall we force an entry? The crisis calls on us to aid Hecuba and the Trojan women.

(HECUBA *enters, calling back into the tent.*)

HECUBA
Strike on, spare not, burst the doors! thou shalt ne'er replace bright vision in thy eyes nor ever see thy children, whom I have slain, alive again.

LEADER
What! hast thou foiled the Thracian, and is the stranger in thy power, mistress mine? is all thy threat now brought to pass?

HECUBA
A moment, and thou shalt see him before the tent, his eyes put out, with random step advancing as a blind man must; yea, and the bodies of his two children whom I with my brave daughters of Troy did slay; he hath paid me his forfeit; look where he cometh from the tent. I will withdraw out of his path and stand aloof from the hot fury of this Thracian, my deadly foe.

(POLYMESTOR *rushes out. Blood is streaming from his eyes.*)

POLYMESTOR (*chanting*)
Woe is me! whither can I go, where halt, or whither turn? shall I crawl upon my hands like a wild four-footed beast on their track? Which path shall I take first, this or that, eager as I am to clutch those Trojan murderesses that have destroyed me? Out upon ye, cursed daughters of Phrygia! to what corner have ye fled cowering before me? O sun-god, would thou couldst heal my bleeding orbs, ridding me of my blindness!

Ha! hush! I catch their stealthy footsteps here. Where can I dart on them and gorge me on their flesh and bones, making for myself a wild beasts' meal, exacting vengeance in requital of their outrage on me? Ah, woe is me! whither am I rushing, leaving my babes unguarded for hell-hounds to mangle, to be murdered and ruthlessly cast forth upon the hills, a feast of blood for dogs? Where shall I stay or turn my steps? where rest? like a ship that lies anchored at sea, so gathering close my linen robe I rush to that chamber of death, to guard my babes.

LEADER

Woe is thee! what grievous outrage hath been wreaked on thee! a fearful penalty for thy foul deed hath the deity imposed, whoe'er he is whose hand is heavy upon thee.

POLYMESTOR (*chanting*)

Woe is me! Ho! my Thracian spearmen, clad in mail, a race of knights whom Ares doth inspire! Ho! Achaeans! sons of Atreus ho! to you I loudly call; come hither, in God's name come! Doth any hearken, or will no man help me? Why do ye delay? Women, captive women have destroyed me. A fearful fate is mine; ah me! my hideous outrage! Whither can I turn or go? Shall I take wings and soar aloft to the mansions of the sky, where Orion and Sirius dart from their eyes a flash as of fire, or shall I, in my misery, plunge to Hades' murky flood?

LEADER

'Tis a venial sin, when a man, suffering from evils too heavy to bear, rids himself of a wretched existence.

(AGAMEMNON *and his retinue enter.*)

AGAMEMNON

Hearing a cry I am come hither; for Echo, child of the mountain-rock, hath sent her voice loud-ringing through the host, causing a tumult. Had I not known that Troy's towers were levelled by the might of Hellas, this uproar had caused no slight terror.

POLYMESTOR

Best of friends! for by thy voice I know thee, Agamemnon, dost see my piteous state?

AGAMEMNON

What! hapless Polymestor, who hath stricken thee? who hath reft thine eyes of sight, staining the pupils with blood? who hath slain these children? whoe'er he was, fierce must have been his wrath against thee and thy children.

POLYMESTOR

Hecuba, helped by the captive women, hath destroyed me; no! not destroyed, far worse than that.

AGAMEMNON (*addressing* HECUBA)

What hast thou to say? Was it thou that didst this deed, as he avers? thou, Hecuba, that hast ventured on this inconceivable daring?

POLYMESTOR

Ha! what is that? is she somewhere near? show me, tell me where, that I may grip her in my hands and rend her limb from limb, bespattering her with gore.

AGAMEMNON

Ho! madman, what wouldst thou?

POLYMESTOR

By heaven I entreat thee, let me vent on her the fury of my arm.

AGAMEMNON

Hold! banish that savage spirit from thy heart and plead thy cause, that after hearing thee and her in turn I may fairly decide what reason there is for thy present sufferings.

POLYMESTOR

I will tell my tale. There was a son of Priam, Polydorus, the youngest, a child by Hecuba, whom his father Priam sent to me from Troy to bring up in my halls, suspecting no doubt the fall of Troy. Him I slew; but hear my reason for so doing, to show how cleverly and wisely I had planned. My fear was that if that child were left to be thy enemy, he would repeople Troy and settle it afresh; and the Achaeans, knowing that a son of Priam survived, might bring another expedition against the Phrygian land and harry and lay waste these plains of Thrace hereafter, for the neighbours of Troy to experience the very troubles we were lately suffering, O king. Now Hecuba, having discovered the death of her son, brought me hither on this pretext, saying she would tell me of hidden treasure stored up in Ilium by the race of Priam; and she led me apart with my children into the tent, that none but I might hear her news. So I sat me down on a couch in their midst to rest; for there were many of the Trojan maidens seated there, some on my right hand, some on my left, as it had been beside a friend; and they were praising the weaving of our Thracian handiwork, looking at this robe as they held it up to the light; meantime others examined my Thracian spear and so stripped me of the protection of both. And those that were young mothers were dandling my children in their arms, with loud admiration, as they passed them on from hand

to hand to remove them far from their father; and then after their smooth speeches (wouldst thou believe it?) in an instant snatching daggers from some secret place in their dress they stab my children; whilst others, like foes, seized me hand and foot; and if I tried to raise my head, anxious to help my babes, they would clutch me by the hair; while if I stirred my hands, I could do nothing, poor wretch! for the numbers of the women. At last they wrought a fearful deed, worse than what had gone before; for they took their brooches and stabbed the pupils of my hapless eyes, making them gush with blood, and then fled through the chambers; up I sprang like a wild beast in pursuit of the shameless murderesses, searching along each wall with hunter's care, dealing buffets, spreading ruin. This then is what I have suffered because of my zeal for thee, O Agamemnon, for slaying an enemy of thine. But to spare thee a lengthy speech; if any of the men of former times have spoken ill of women, if any doth so now, or shall do so hereafter, all this in one short sentence will I say; for neither land or sea produces a race so pestilent, as whosoever hath had to do with them knows full well.

LEADER

Curb thy bold tongue, and do not, because of thy own woes, thus embrace the whole race of women in one reproach; for though some of us, and those a numerous class, deserve to be disliked, there are others amongst us who rank naturally amongst the good.

HECUBA

Never ought words to have outweighed deeds in this world, Agamemnon. No! if a man's deeds had been good, so should his words have been; if, on the other hand, evil, his words should have betrayed their unsoundness, instead of its being possible at times to give a fair complexion to injustice. There are, 'tis true, clever persons, who have made a science of this, but their cleverness cannot last for ever; a miserable end awaits them; none ever yet escaped. This is a warning I give thee at the outset. Now will I turn to this fellow, and will give thee thy answer, thou who sayest it was to save Achaea double toil and for Agamemnon's sake that thou didst slay my son. Nay, villain, in the first place how could the barbarian race ever be friends with Hellas? Impossible, ever. Again, what interest hadst thou to further by thy zeal? was it to form some marriage, or on the score of kin, or, prithee, why? or was it likely that they would sail hither again and destroy thy country's crops? Whom dost thou expect to persuade into believing that? Wouldst thou but speak the truth, it was the gold that slew my son, and thy greedy spirit. Now tell me this; why, when Troy was victorious, when her ramparts still stood round her, when Priam was alive, and Hector's warring prospered, why didst thou

not, if thou wert really minded to do Agamemnon a service, then slay the child, for thou hadst him in thy palace 'neath thy care, or bring him with thee alive to the Argives? Instead of this, when our sun was set and the smoke of our city showed it was in the enemy's power, thou didst murder the guest who had come to thy hearth. Furthermore, to prove thy villainly, hear this; if thou wert really a friend to those Achaeans, thou shouldst have brought the gold, which thou sayst thou art keeping not for thyself but for Agamemnon, and given it to them, for they were in need and had endured a long exile from their native land. Whereas not even now canst thou bring thyself to part with it, but persistest in keeping it in thy palace. Again, hadst thou kept my son safe and sound, as thy duty was, a fair renown would have been thy reward, for it is in trouble's hour that the good most clearly show their friendship; though prosperity of itself in every case finds friends. Wert thou in need of money and he prosperous, that son of mine would have been as a mighty treasure for thee to draw upon; but now thou hast him no longer to be thy friend, and the benefit of the gold is gone from thee, thy children too are dead, and thyself art in this sorry plight.

To thee, Agamemnon, I say, if thou help this man, thou wilt show thy worthlessness; for thou wilt be serving one devoid of honour or piety, a stranger to the claims of good faith, a wicked host; while I shall say thou delightest in evil-doers, being such an one thyself; but I rail not at my masters.

LEADER

Look you! how a good cause ever affords men an opening for a good speech.

AGAMEMNON

To be judge in a stranger's troubles goes much against my grain, but still I must; yea, for to take this matter in hand and then put it from me is a shameful course. My opinion, that thou mayst know it, is that it was not for the sake of the Achaeans or me that thou didst slay thy guest, but to keep that gold in thy own house. In thy trouble thou makest a case in thy own interests. Maybe amongst you 'tis a light thing to murder guests, but with us in Hellas 'tis a disgrace. How can I escape reproach if I judge thee not guilty? I cannot do it. Nay, since thou didst dare thy horrid crime, endure as well its painful consequence.

POLYMESTOR

Woe is me! worsted by a woman and a slave, I am, it seems, to suffer by unworthy hands.

HECUBA

Is it not just for thy atrocious crime?

POLYMESTOR

Ah, my children! ah, my blinded eyes! woe is me!

HECUBA

Dost thou grieve? what of me? thinkst thou I grieve not for my son?

POLYMESTOR

Thou wicked wretch! thy delight is in mocking me.

HECUBA

I am avenged on thee; have I not cause for joy?

POLYMESTOR

The joy will soon cease, in the day when ocean's flood—

HECUBA

Shall convey me to the shores of Hellas?

POLYMESTOR

Nay, but close o'er thee when thou fallest from the masthead.

HECUBA

Who will force me to take the leap?

POLYMESTOR

Of thy own accord wilt thou climb the ship's mast.

HECUBA

With wings upon my back, or by what means?

POLYMESTOR

Thou wilt become a dog with bloodshot eyes.

HECUBA

How knowest thou of my transformation?

POLYMESTOR

Dionysus, our Thracian prophet, told me so.

HECUBA

And did he tell thee nothing of thy present trouble?

POLYMESTOR

No; else hadst thou never caught me thus by guile.

HECUBA

Shall I die or live, and so complete my life on earth?

POLYMESTOR

Die shalt thou; and to thy tomb shall be given a name—

HECUBA

Recalling my form, or what wilt thou tell me?

POLYMESTOR

"The hapless hound's grave," a mark for mariners.[3]

HECUBA

'Tis naught to me, now that thou hast paid me forfeit.

POLYMESTOR

Further, thy daughter Cassandra must die.

HECUBA

I scorn the prophecy! I give it to thee to keep for thyself.

POLYMESTOR

Her shall the wife of Agamemnon, grim keeper of his palace, slay.

HECUBA

Never may the daughter of Tyndareus do such a frantic deed!

POLYMESTOR

And she shall slay this king as well, lifting high the axe.

AGAMEMNON

Ha! sirrah, art thou mad? art so eager to find sorrow?

POLYMESTOR

Kill me, for in Argos there awaits thee a murderous bath.

AGAMEMNON

Ho! servants, hale him from my sight!

POLYMESTOR

Ha! my words gall thee?

AGAMEMNON

Stop his mouth!

POLYMESTOR

Close it now; for I have spoken.

AGAMEMNON

Haste and cast him upon some desert island, since his mouth is full of such exceeding presumption. Go thou, unhappy Hecuba, and bury thy two corpses; and you, Trojan women, to your masters' tents repair, for lo! I perceive a breeze just rising to waft us home. God grant we reach our country and find all well at home, released from troubles here!

(POLYMESTOR *is dragged away by* AGAMEMNON'S *guards.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Away to the harbour and the tents, my friends, to prove the toils of slavery! for such is fate's relentless hest.

NOTES FOR HECUBA

THE translation of Coleridge has been slightly modified in the following lines: 193, 424, 608, 614, 710, 874, 901, 903, 1028, 1038, 1040, 1113, 1137, 1146, 1237.

1. This episode is in part recorded in Homer's *Odyssey*, IV, 240 ff.

2. These lines reflect the growing importance of rhetoric in Athens at the time when the *Hecuba* was first produced. Plato, although he was writing somewhat later, has much to say of the "art of persuasion."

3. The transformation and death of Hecuba were traditionally connected with the name of a promontory in the Thracian Chersonese, Cynossema.

V

ANDROMACHE

Characters in the Play

Andromache
Maid of Andromache
Chorus of Phthian Women
Hermione, *daughter of* Menelaus *and wife of Neoptolemus*
Menelaus, *King of Sparta*
Molossus, *son of* Andromache *and Neoptolemus*
Peleus, *father of Achilles*
Nurse of Hermione
Orestes, *son of Agamemnon*
Messenger
Thetis, *the goddess, wife of* Peleus
Various attendants

INTRODUCTION

THE *Andromache* has never ranked high among Euripides' tragedies. It was written and produced probably in the early years of the Peloponnesian War, but unfortunately we do not possess the requisite information to date it more precisely. We do know, however, that it was presented for the first time not at Athens, but in one of the dramatic contests held in some rural district. The plot is focussed upon the fortunes of Andromache, the widow of Hector, but now the slave and concubine of Achilles' son, Neoptolemus. In the prologue, composed in the customary Euripidean fashion, Andromache herself explains her situation—that after Troy's destruction she became the captive of Neoptolemus, that she has borne him a son, and that she is hated by Hermione, whom her master has recently married. It is regrettable that Euripides has not concentrated his attention upon a study of this domestic situation and its implications, but rather has tended to emphasize the plot, which, though it contains tense moments, is unconvincingly developed through too frequent use of timely but ill-motivated entrances of new characters.

Structurally the play seems to fall into two parts which are but remotely connected with one another. The first section, wherein the proud Hermione and her villainous father, Menelaus, are on the point of killing Andromache and her son, seems to end satisfactorily, if somewhat melodramatically, when the aged Peleus comes to the rescue. But the play goes on to present Hermione in hysterical remorse, Orestes coming to take Hermione away, since he has already planned her husband's murder, Peleus bearing the undeserved brunt of the "tragedy" when Neoptolemus' body is brought in, and the final adjustment of the situation when the goddess Thetis appears. The poet loses sight of Andromache and the play loses its unity accordingly.

Menelaus as a character is interesting. He embodies all the most detestable Spartan characteristics which were rousing the hatred of the Athenians during these early days of the war. In fact, the contemporary situation of Athens in its conflict with Sparta seems to have been prominent in the poet's mind as he wrote. The portrayal of Andromache is likewise not without its power, but the treatment of character throughout

seems to suffer because Euripides uses too often the somewhat artificial technique of formal debate between the persons of his play. However, despite defects in structure and portrayal of character, and despite its failure to achieve a universality necessary to tragedy, the play is notable for passages where Euripidean pathos is at its best. Andromache and her son as they face their doom will always stir emotional depths. Any play which contains such scenes as this will command its fair due of respect from the discriminating critic.

ANDROMACHE

(SCENE:—*Before the temple of* THETIS *in Thessaly.* ANDROMACHE, *dressed as a suppliant, is clinging to the altar in front of the temple. The palace of Achilles is nearby.*)

ANDROMACHE

O CITY of Thebes, glory of Asia, whence on a day I came to Priam's princely home with many a rich and costly thing in my dower, affianced unto Hector to be the mother of his children, I Andromache, envied name in days of yore, but now of all women that have been or yet shall be the most unfortunate; for I have lived to see my husband Hector slain by Achilles, and the babe Astyanax, whom I bore my lord, hurled from the towering battlements, when the Hellenes sacked our Trojan home; and I myself am come to Hellas as a slave, though I was esteemed a daughter of a race most free, given to Neoptolemus that island-prince, and set apart for him as his special prize from the spoils of Troy. And here I dwell upon the boundaries of Phthia and Pharsalia's town, where Thetis erst, the goddess of the sea, abode with Peleus apart from the world, avoiding the throng of men; wherefore the folk of Thessaly call it the sacred place of Thetis, in honour of the goddess's marriage. Here dwells the son of Achilles and suffers Peleus still to rule Pharsalia, not wishing to assume the sceptre while the old man lives. Within these halls have I borne a boy to the son of Achilles, my master. Now aforetime for all my misery I ever had a hope to lead me on, that, if my child were safe, I might find some help and protection from my woes; but since my lord in scorn of his bondmaid's charms hath wedded that Spartan Hermione, I am tormented by her most cruelly; for she saith that I by secret enchantment am making her barren and distasteful to her husband, and that I design to take her place in this house, ousting her the rightful mistress by force; whereas I at first submitted against my will and now have resigned my place; be almighty Zeus my witness that it was not of my own free will I became her rival!

But I cannot convince her, and she longs to kill me, and her father

Menelaus is an accomplice in this. E'en now is he within, arrived from Sparta for this very purpose, while I in terror am come to take up a position here in the shrine of Thetis adjoining the house, if haply it may save me from death; for Peleus and his descendants hold it in honour as a symbol of his marriage with the Nereid. My only son am I secretly conveying to a neighbour's house in fear for his life. For his sire stands not by my side to lend his aid and cannot avail his child at all, being absent in the land of Delphi, where he is offering recompense to Loxias for the madness he committed, when on a day he went to Pytho and demanded of Phoebus satisfaction for his father's death,[1] if haply his prayer might avert those past sins and win for him the god's goodwill hereafter.

(*The* MAID OF ANDROMACHE *enters.*)

MAID

Mistress mine, be sure I do not hesitate to call thee by that name, seeing that I thought it thy right in thine own house also, when we dwelt in Troy-land; as I was ever thy friend and thy husband's while yet he was alive, so now have I come with strange tidings, in terror lest any of our masters learn hereof but still out of pity for thee; for Menelaus and his daughter are forming dire plots against thee, whereof thou must beware.

ANDROMACHE

Ah! kind companion of my bondage, for such thou art to her, who, erst thy queen, is now sunk in misery; what are they doing? What new schemes are they devising in their eagerness to take away my wretched life?

MAID

Alas! poor lady, they intend to slay thy son, whom thou hast privily conveyed from out the house.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me! Has she heard that my babe was put out of her reach? Who told her? Woe is me! how utterly undone!

MAID

I know not, but thus much of their schemes I heard myself; and Menelaus has left the house to fetch him.

ANDROMACHE

Then am I lost; ah, my child! those vultures twain will take and slay thee; while he who is called thy father lingers still in Delphi.

MAID

True, for had he been here thou wouldst not have fared so hardly, I am sure; but, as it is, thou art friendless.

ANDROMACHE

Have no tidings come that Peleus may arrive?

MAID

He is too old to help thee if he came.

ANDROMACHE

And yet I sent for him more than once.

MAID

Surely thou dost not suppose that any of thy messengers heed thee?

ANDROMACHE

Why should they? Wilt thou then go for me?

MAID

How shall I explain my long absence from the house?

ANDROMACHE

Thou art a woman; thou canst invent a hundred ways.

MAID

There is a risk, for Hermione keeps no careless guard.

ANDROMACHE

Dost look to that? Thou art disowning thy friends in distress.

MAID

Not so; never taunt me with that. I will go, for of a truth a woman and a slave is not of much account, e'en if aught befall me.

(*The* MAID *withdraws.*)

ANDROMACHE

Go then, while I will tell to heaven the lengthy tale of lamentation, mourning, and weeping, that has ever been my hard lot; for 'tis woman's way to delight in present misfortunes even to keeping them always on her tongue and lips. But I have many reasons, not merely one for tears,—my city's fall, my Hector's death, the hardness of the lot to which I am bound, since I fell on slavery's evil days undeservedly. 'Tis never right to call a son of man happy, till thou hast seen his end, to judge from the way he passes it how he will descend to that other world.

(*She begins to chant.*)

'Twas no bride Paris took with him to the towers of Ilium, but a curse to his bed when he brought Helen to her bower. For her sake, O Troy, did eager warriors, sailing from Hellas in a thousand ships, capture and make thee a prey to fire and sword; and the son of sea-born Thetis mounted on his chariot dragged my husband Hector

round the walls, ah woe is me! while I was hurried from my chamber to the beach, with slavery's hateful pall upon me. And many a tear I shed as I left my city, my bridal bower, and my husband in the dust. Woe, woe is me! why should I prolong my life, to serve Hermione? Her cruelty it is that drives me hither to the image of the goddess to throw my suppliant arms about it, melting to tears as doth a spring that gushes from the rock.

(*The* CHORUS OF PHTHIAN WOMEN *enters.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Lady, thus keeping thy weary station without pause upon the floor of Thetis' shrine, Phthian though I am, to thee a daughter of Asia I come, to see if I can devise some remedy for these perplexing troubles, which have involved thee and Hermione in fell discord, because to thy sorrow thou sharest with her the love of Achilles' son.

antistrophe 1

Recognize thy position, weigh the present evil into the which thou art come. Thou art a Trojan captive; thy rival is thy mistress, a true-born daughter of Sparta. Leave then this home of sacrifice, the shrine of our sea-goddess. How can it avail thee to waste thy comeliness and disfigure it by weeping by reason of a mistress's harsh usage? Might will prevail against thee; why vainly toil in thy feebleness?

strophe 2

Come, quit the bright sanctuary of the Nereid divine. Recognize that thou art in bondage on a foreign soil, in a strange city, where thou seest none of all thy friends, luckless lady, cast on evil days.

antistrophe 2

Yea, I did pity thee most truly, Trojan dame, when thou camest to this house; but from fear of my mistress I hold my peace, albeit I sympathize with thee, lest she, whom Zeus's daughter bore, discover my good will toward thee.

(HERMIONE *enters, in complete royal regalia.*)

HERMIONE

With a crown of golden workmanship upon my head and about my body this embroidered robe am I come hither; no presents these I wear from the palace of Achilles or Peleus, but gifts my father Menelaus gave me together with a sumptuous dower from Sparta in Laconia, to insure me freedom of speech. Such is my answer to you (*to the* CHORUS); but as

for thee, slave and captive, thou wouldst fain oust me and secure this palace for thyself, and thanks to thy enchantment I am hated by my husband; thou it is that hast made my womb barren and cheated my hopes; for Asia's daughters have clever heads for such villainy; yet will I check thee therefrom, nor shall this temple of the Nereid avail thee aught, no! neither its altar or shrine, but thou shalt die. But if or god or man should haply wish to save thee, thou must atone for thy proud thoughts of happier days now past by humbling thyself and crouching prostrate at my knees, by sweeping out my halls, and by learning, as thou sprinklest water from a golden ewer, where thou now art. Here is no Hector, no Priam with his gold, but a city of Hellas. Yet thou, miserable woman, hast gone so far in wantonness that thou canst lay thee down with the son of the very man that slew thy husband, and bear children to the murderer. Such is all the race of barbarians; father and daughter, mother and son, sister and brother mate together; the nearest and dearest stain their path with each other's blood, and no law restrains such horrors. Bring not these crimes amongst us, for here we count it shame that one man should have the control of two wives, and men are content to turn to one lawful love, that is, all who care to live an honourable life.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Women are by nature somewhat jealous, and do ever show the keenest hate to rivals in their love.

ANDROMACHE

Ah! well-a-day! Youth is a bane to mortals, in every case, that is, where a man embraces injustice in his early days. Now I am afraid that my being a slave will prevent thee listening to me in spite of many a just plea, or if I win my case, I fear I may be damaged on this very ground, for the high and mighty cannot brook refuting arguments from their inferiors; still I will not be convicted of betraying my own cause. Tell me, proud young wife, what assurance can make me confident of wresting from thee thy lawful lord? Is it that Laconia's capital yields to Phrygia? is it that my fortune outstrips thine? or that in me thou seest a free woman? Am I so elated by my youth, my full healthy figure, the extent of my city, the number of my friends that I wish to supplant thee in thy home? Is my purpose to take thy place and rear myself a race of slaves, mere appendages to my misery? or, supposing thou bear no children, will any one endure that sons of mine should rule o'er Phthia? Ah no! there is the love that Hellas bears me, both for Hector's sake and for my own humble rank forsooth, that never knew a queen's estate in Troy. 'Tis not my sorcery that makes thy husband hate thee, nay, but thy own failure to prove thyself his help-meet. Herein lies love's only charm; 'tis not beauty, lady, but virtuous acts that win our husbands' hearts. And

though it gall thee to be told so, albeit thy city in Laconia is no doubt a mighty fact, yet thou findest no place for his Scyros, displaying wealth 'midst poverty and setting Menelaus above Achilles: and that is what alienates thy lord. Take heed; for a woman, though bestowed upon a worthless husband, must be with him content, and ne'er advance presumptuous claims. Suppose thou hadst wedded a prince of Thrace, the land of flood and melting snow, where one lord shares his affections with a host of wives, wouldst thou have slain them? If so, thou wouldst have set a stigma of insatiate lust on all our sex. A shameful charge! And yet herein we suffer more than men, though we make a good stand against it. Ah! my dear lord Hector, for thy sake would I e'en brook a rival, if ever Cypris led thee astray, and oft in days gone by I held thy bastard babes to my own breast, to spare thee any cause for grief. By this course I bound my husband to me by virtue's chains, whereas thou wilt never so much as let the drops of dew from heaven above settle on thy lord, in thy jealous fear. Oh! seek not to surpass thy mother in hankering after men, for 'tis well that all wise children should avoid the habits of such evil mothers.

LEADER

Mistress mine, be persuaded to come to terms with her, as far as readily comes within thy power.

HERMIONE

Why this haughty tone, this bandying of words, as if, forsooth, thou, not I, wert the virtuous wife?

ANDROMACHE

Thy present claims at any rate give thee small title thereto.

HERMIONE

Woman, may my bosom never harbour such ideas as thine!

ANDROMACHE

Thou art young to speak on such a theme as this.

HERMIONE

As for thee, thou dost not speak thereof, but, as thou canst, dost put it into action against me.

ANDROMACHE

Canst thou not conceal thy pangs of jealousy?

HERMIONE

What! doth not every woman put this first of all?

ANDROMACHE

Yes, if her experiences are happy; otherwise, there is no honour in speaking of them.

HERMIONE

Barbarians' laws are not a standard for our city.

ANDROMACHE

Alike in Asia and in Hellas infamy attends base actions.

HERMIONE

Clever, clever quibbler! yet die thou must and shalt.

ANDROMACHE

Dost see the image of Thetis with her eye upon thee?

HERMIONE

A bitter foe to thy country because of the death of Achilles.

ANDROMACHE

'Twas not I that slew him, but Helen that mother of thine.

HERMIONE

Pray, is it thy intention to probe my wounds yet deeper?

ANDROMACHE

Behold, I am dumb, my lips are closed.

HERMIONE

Tell me that which was my only reason for coming hither.

ANDROMACHE

No! all I tell thee is, thou hast less wisdom than thou needest.

HERMIONE

Wilt thou leave these hallowed precincts of the sea-goddess?

ANDROMACHE

Yes, if I am not to die for it; otherwise, I never will.

HERMIONE

Since that is thy resolve, I shall not even wait my lord's return.

ANDROMACHE

Nor yet will I, at any rate ere that, surrender to thee.

HERMIONE

I will bring fire to bear on thee, and pay no heed to thy entreaties

ANDROMACHE

Kindle thy blaze then; the gods will witness it.

HERMIONE

And make thy flesh to writhe by cruel wounds.

ANDROMACHE

Begin thy butchery, stain the altar of the goddess with blood, for she will visit thy iniquity.

HERMIONE

Barbarian creature, hardened in impudence, wilt thou brave death itself? Still will I find speedy means to make these quit this seat of thy free will; such a bait have I to lure thee with. But I will hide my meaning, which the event itself shall soon declare. Yes, keep thy seat, for I will make thee rise, though molten lead is holding thee there, before Achilles' son, thy trusted champion, arrive.

(HERMIONE *departs.*)

ANDROMACHE

My trusted champion, yes! how strange it is, that though some god hath devised cures for mortals against the venom of reptiles, no man ever yet hath discovered aught to cure a woman's venom, which is far worse than viper's sting or scorching flame; so terrible a curse are we to mankind.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ah! what sorrows did the son of Zeus and Maia herald, in the day he came to Ida's glen, guiding that fair young trio of goddesses, all girded for the fray in bitter rivalry about their beauty, to the shepherd's fold where dwelt the youthful herdsman all alone by the hearth of his lonely hut.

antistrophe 1

Soon as they reached the wooded glen, in gushing mountain springs they bathed their dazzling skin, then sought the son of Priam, comparing their rival charms in more than rancorous phrase. But Cypris won the day by her deceitful promises, sweet-sounding words, but fraught with ruthless overthrow to Phrygia's hapless town and Ilium's towers.

strophe 2

Would God his mother had smitten him a cruel death-blow on the head before he made his home on Ida's slopes, in the hour Cassandra,

standing by the holy bay-tree, cried out, "Slay him, for he will bring most grievous bane on Priam's town." To every prince she went, to every elder sued for the babe's destruction.

antistrophe 2

Ah! had they listened, Ilium's daughters ne'er had felt the yoke of slavery, and thou, lady, hadst been established in the royal palace; and Hellas had been freed of all the anguish she suffered during those ten long years her sons went wandering, spear in hand, around the walls of Troy; brides had never been left desolate, nor hoary fathers childless.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue enter. He is leading* MOLOSSUS *by the hand.*)

MENELAUS

Behold I bring thy son with me, whom thou didst steal away to a neighbour's house without my daughter's knowledge. Thou wert so sure this image of the goddess would protect thee and those who hid him, but thou hast not proved clever enough for Menelaus. And so if thou refuse to leave thy station here, he shall be slain instead of thee. Wherefore weigh it well: wilt die thyself, or see him slain for the sin whereof thou art guilty against me and my daughter?

ANDROMACHE

O fame, fame! full many a man ere now of no account hast thou to high estate exalted. Those, indeed, who truly have a fair repute, I count blest; but those who get it by false pretences, I will never allow have aught but the accidental appearance of wisdom. Thou for instance, caitiff that thou art, didst thou ever wrest Troy from Priam with thy picked troops of Hellenes? thou that hast raised such a storm, at the word of thy daughter, a mere child, and hast entered the lists with a poor captive; unworthy I count thee of Troy's capture, and Troy still more disgraced by thy victory. Those who only in appearance are men of sense make an outward show, but inwardly resemble the common herd, save it be in wealth, which is their chiefest strength.

Come now, Menelaus, let us carry through this argument. Suppose I am slain by thy daughter, and she work her will on me, yet can she never escape the pollution of murder, and public opinion will make thee too an accomplice in this deed of blood, for thy share in the business must needs implicate thee. But even supposing I escape death myself, will ye kill my child? Even then, how will his father brook the murder of his child? Troy has no such coward's tale to tell of him; nay, he will follow duty's call; his actions will prove him a worthy scion of Peleus and Achilles.

Thy daughter will be thrust forth from his house; and what wilt thou say when seeking to betroth her to another? wilt say her virtue made her leave a worthless lord? Nay, that will be false. Who then will wed her? wilt thou keep her without a husband in thy halls, grown grey in widowhood? Unhappy wretch! dost not see the flood-gates of trouble opening wide for thee? How many a wrong against a wife wouldst thou prefer thy daughter to have found to suffering what I now describe? We ought not on trifling grounds to promote great ills; nor should men, if we women are so deadly a curse, bring their nature down to our level. No! if, as thy daughter asserts, I am practising sorcery against her and making her barren, right willingly will I, without any crouching at altars, submit in my own person to the penalty that lies in her husband's hands, seeing that I am no less chargeable with injuring him if I make him childless. This is my case; but for thee, there is one thing I fear in thy disposition; it was a quarrel for a woman that really induced thee to destroy poor Ilium's town.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou hast said too much for a woman speaking to men; *that* discretion hath shot away its last shaft from thy soul's quiver.

MENELAUS

Women, these are petty matters, unworthy, as thou sayest, of my despotic sway, unworthy too of Hellas. Yet mark this well; his special fancy of the hour is of more moment to a man than Troy's capture. I then have set myself to help my daughter because I consider her loss of a wife's rights most grave; for whatever else a woman suffers is second to this; if she loses her husband's love she loses her life therewith. Now, as it is right Neoptolemus should rule my slaves, so my friends and I should have control of his; for friends, if they be really friends, keep nothing to themselves, but have all in common. So if I wait for the absent instead of making the best arrangement I can at once of my affairs, I show weakness, not wisdom. Arise then, leave the goddess's shrine, for by thy death this child escapeth his, whereas, if thou refuse to die, I will slay him; for one of you twain must perish.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me! 'tis a bitter lot thou art offering about my life; whether I take it or not I am equally unfortunate. Attend to me, thou who for a trifling cause art committing an awful crime. Why art thou bent on slaying me? What reason hast thou? What city have I betrayed? Which of thy children was ever slain by me? What house have I fired? I was forced to be my master's concubine; and spite of that wilt thou slay me, not him who is to blame, passing by the cause and hurrying to the inevitable result?

Ah me! my sorrows! Woe for my hapless country! How cruel my fate! Why had I to be a mother too and take upon me a double load of suffering? Yet why do I mourn the past, and o'er the present never shed a tear or compute its griefs? I that saw Hector butchered and dragged behind the chariot, and Ilium, piteous sight! one sheet of flame, while I was haled away by the hair of my head to the Argive ships in slavery, and on my arrival in Phthia was given to Hector's murderer as his mistress. What pleasure then has life for me? Whither am I to turn my gaze? to the present or the past? My babe alone was left me, the light of my life; and him these ministers of death would slay. No! they shall not, if my poor life can save him; for if he be saved, hope in him lives on, while to me 'twere shame to refuse to die for my son. Lo! here I leave the altar and give myself into your hands, to cut or stab, to bind or hang. Ah! my child, to Hades now thy mother passes to save thy dear life. Yet if thou escape thy doom, remember me, my sufferings and my death, and tell thy father how I fared, with fond caress and streaming eye and arms thrown round his neck. Ah! yes, his children are to every man as his own soul; and whoso sneers at this through inexperience, though he suffers less anguish, yet tastes the bitter in his cup of bliss.

LEADER

Thy tale with pity fills me; for every man alike, stranger though he be, feels pity for another's distress. Menelaus, 'tis thy duty to reconcile thy daughter and this captive, giving her a respite from sorrow.

MENELAUS

Ho! sirrahs, seize this woman (*His attendants swiftly carry out the order.*); hold her fast; for 'tis no welcome story she will have to hear. It was to make thee leave the holy altar of the goddess that I held thy child's death before thy eyes, and so induced thee to give thyself up to me to die. So stands thy case, be well assured; but as for this child, my daughter shall decide whether she will slay him or no. Get thee hence into the house, and there learn to bridle thy insolence in speaking to the free, slave that thou art.

ANDROMACHE

Alas! thou hast by treachery beguiled me; I was deceived.

MENELAUS

Proclaim it to the world; I do not deny it.

ANDROMACHE

Is this counted cleverness amongst you who dwell by the Eurotas?

MENELAUS

Yes, and amongst Trojans too, that those who suffer should retaliate.

ANDROMACHE

Thinkest thou God's hand is shortened, and that thou wilt not be punished?

MENELAUS

Whene'er that comes, I am ready to bear it. But thy life will I have.

ANDROMACHE

Wilt likewise slay this tender chick, whom thou hast snatched from 'neath my wing?

MENELAUS

Not I, but I will give him to my daughter to slay if she will.

ANDROMACHE

Ah me! why not begin my mourning then for thee, my child?

MENELAUS

Of a truth 'tis no very sure hope that he has left.

ANDROMACHE

O citizens of Sparta, the bane of all the race of men, schemers of guile, and masters in lying, devisers of evil plots, with crooked minds and tortuous methods and ne'er one honest thought, 'tis wrong that ye should thrive in Hellas. What crime is wanting in your list? How rife is murder with you! How covetous ye are! One word upon your lips, another in your heart, this is what men always find with you. Perdition catch ye! Still death is not so grievous, as thou thinkest, to me. No! for my life ended in the day that hapless Troy was destroyed with my lord, that glorious warrior, whose spear oft made a coward like thee quit the field and seek thy ship. But now against a woman hast thou displayed the terrors of thy panoply, my would-be murderer. Strike then! for this my tongue shall never flatter thee or that daughter of thine. For though thou wert of great account in Sparta, why so was I in Troy. And if I am now in sorry plight, presume not thou on this; thou too mayst be so yet.

(MENELAUS *and his guards lead* ANDROMACHE *out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Never, oh! never will I commend rival wives or sons of different mothers, a cause of strife, of bitterness, and grief in every house. I would have a husband content with one wife whose rights he shareth with no other.

antistrophe 1

Not even in states is dual monarchy better to bear than undivided rule; it only doubles burdens and causes faction amongst the citizens. Often too will the Muse sow strife 'twixt rivals in the art of minstrelsy.

strophe 2

Again, when strong winds are drifting mariners, the divided counsel of the wise does not best avail for steering, and their collective wisdom has less weight than the inferior mind of the single man who has sole authority; for this is the essence of power alike in house and state, whene'er men care to find the proper moment.

antistrophe 2

This Spartan, the daughter of the great chief Menelaus, proves this; for she hath kindled hot fury against a rival, and is bent on slaying the hapless Trojan maid and her child to further her bitter quarrel. 'Tis a murder gods and laws and kindness all forbid. Ah! lady, retribution for this deed will yet visit thee.

But lo! before the house I see those two united souls, condemned to die. Alas! for thee, poor lady, and for thee, unhappy child, who art dying on account of thy mother's marriage, though thou hast no share therein and canst not be blamed by the royal house.

(ANDROMACHE *enters, her arms bound. Her son clings to her.* MENELAUS *and the guards follow, intent on accomplishing the murder. The following lines are chanted responsively.*)

ANDROMACHE

Behold me journeying on the downward path, my hands so tightly bound with cords that they bleed.

MOLOSSUS

O mother, mother mine! I too share thy downward path, nestling 'neath thy wing.

ANDROMACHE

A cruel sacrifice! ye rulers of Phthia!

MOLOSSUS

Come, father! succour those thou lovest.

ANDROMACHE

Rest there, my babe, my darling! on thy mother's bosom, e'en in death and in the grave.

MOLOSSUS

Ah, woe is me! what will become of me and thee too, mother mine?

MENELAUS

Away, to the world below! from hostile towers ye came, the pair of you; two different causes necessitate your deaths; my sentence takes away thy life, and my daughter Hermione's requires his; for it would be the height of folly to leave our foemen's sons, when we might kill them and remove the danger from our house.

ANDROMACHE

O husband mine! I would I had thy strong arm and spear to aid me, son of Priam.

MOLOSSUS

Ah, woe is me! what spell can I now find to turn death's stroke aside?

ANDROMACHE

Embrace thy master's knees, my child, and pray to him.

MOLOSSUS

Spare, O spare my life, kind master!

ANDROMACHE

Mine eyes are wet with tears, which trickle down my cheeks, as doth a sunless spring from a smooth rock. Ah me!

MOLOSSUS

What remedy, alas! can I provide me 'gainst my ills?

MENELAUS

Why fall at my knees in supplication? hard as the rock and deaf as the wave am I. My own friends have I helped, but for thee have I no tie of affection; for verily it cost me a great part of my life to capture Troy and thy mother; so thou shalt reap the fruit thereof and into Hades' halls descend.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Behold! I see Peleus drawing nigh; with aged step he hasteth hither.

(PELEUS *enters with an attendant.*)

PELEUS (*calling out as he comes in sight*)

What means this? I ask you and your executioner; why is the palace in an uproar? give a reason; what mean your lawless machinations? Menelaus, hold thy hand. Seek not to outrun justice. (*To his attendant*) For-

ward! faster, faster! for this matter, methinks, admits of no delay; now if ever would I fain resume the vigour of my youth. First however will I breathe new life into this captive, being to her as the breeze that blows a ship before the wind. Tell me, by what right have they pinioned thine arms and are dragging thee and thy child away? Like a ewe with her lamb art thou led to the slaughter, while I and thy lord were far away.

ANDROMACHE

Behold them that are haling me and my child to death, e'en as thou seest, aged prince. Why should I tell thee? For not by one urgent summons alone but by countless messengers have I sent for thee. No doubt thou knowest by hearsay of the strife in this house with this man's daughter, and the reason of my ruin. So now they have torn and are dragging me from the altar of Thetis, the goddess of thy chiefest adoration and the mother of thy gallant son, without any proper trial, yea, and without waiting for my absent master; because, forsooth, they knew my defencelessness and my child's, whom they mean to slay with me his hapless mother, though he has done no harm. But to thee, O sire, I make my supplication, prostrate at thy knees, though my hand cannot touch thy friendly beard; save me, I adjure thee, reverend sir, or to thy shame and my sorrow shall we be slain.

PELEUS

Loose her bonds, I say, ere some one rue it; untie her folded hands.

MENELAUS

I forbid it, for besides being a match for thee, I have a far better right to her.

PELEUS

What! art thou come hither to set my house in order? Art not content with ruling thy Spartans?

MENELAUS

She is my captive; I took her from Troy.

PELEUS

Aye, but my son's son received her as his prize.

MENELAUS

Is not all I have his, and all his mine?

PELEUS

For good, but not evil ends; and surely not for murderous violence.

MENELAUS

Never shalt thou wrest her from my grasp.

PELEUS

With this good staff I'll stain thy head with blood!

MENELAUS

Just touch me and see! Approach one step!

PELEUS

What! shalt thou rank with men? chief of cowards, son of cowards! What right hast thou to any place 'mongst men? Thou who didst let a Phrygian rob thee of thy wife, leaving thy home without bolt or guard, as if forsooth the cursed woman thou hadst there was a model of virtue. No! a Spartan maid could not be chaste, e'en if she would, who leaves her home and bares her limbs and lets her robe float free, to share with youths their races and their sports,—customs I cannot away with. Is it any wonder then that ye fail to educate your women in virtue? Helen might have asked thee this, seeing that she said goodbye to thy affection and tripped off with her young gallant to a foreign land. And yet for her sake thou didst marshal all the hosts of Hellas and lead them to Ilium, whereas thou shouldst have shown thy loathing for her by refusing to stir a spear, once thou hadst found her false; yea, thou shouldst have let her stay there, and even paid a price to save ever having her back again. But that was not at all the way thy thoughts were turned; wherefore many a brave life hast thou ended, and many an aged mother hast thou left childless in her home, and grey-haired sires of gallant sons hast reft. Of that sad band am I a member, seeing in thee Achilles' murderer like a malignant fiend; for thou and thou alone hast returned from Troy without a scratch, bringing back thy splendid weapons in their splendid cases just as they went. As for me, I ever told that amorous boy to form no alliance with thee nor take unto his home an evil mother's child; for daughters bear the marks of their mothers' ill-repute into their new homes. Wherefore, ye wooers, take heed to this my warning: "Choose the daughter of a good mother." And more than this, with what wanton insult didst thou treat thy brother, bidding him sacrifice his daughter in his simpleness! So fearful wast thou of losing thy worthless wife. Then after capturing Troy,—for thither too will I accompany thee,—thou didst not slay that woman, when she was in thy power; but as soon as thine eyes caught sight of her breast, thy sword was dropped and thou didst take her kisses, fondling the shameless traitress, too weak to stem thy hot desire, thou caitiff wretch! Yet spite of all thou art the man to come and work havoc in my grandson's halls when he is absent, seeking to slay with all indignity a poor weak woman and her babe; but that babe shall one day make thee and thy daughter in thy

home rue it, e'en though his birth be trebly base. Yea, for oft ere now hath seed, sown on barren soil, prevailed o'er rich deep tilth, and many a bastard has proved a better man than children better born. Take thy daughter hence with thee! Far better is it for mortals to have a poor honest man either as married kin or friend than a wealthy knave; but as for thee, thou art a thing of naught.

LEADER

The tongue from trifling causes contrives to breed great strife 'mongst men; wherefore are the wise most careful not to bring about a quarrel with their friends.

MENELAUS

Why, pray, should one call these old men wise, or those who once had a reputation in Hellas for being so? when thou, the great Peleus, son of a famous father, kin to me through marriage, employest language disgraceful to thyself and abusive of me because of a barbarian woman, though thou shouldst have banished her far beyond the streams of Nile or Phasis, and ever encouraged me; seeing that she comes from Asia's continent where fell so many of the sons of Hellas, victims to the spear; and likewise because she shared in the spilling of thy son's blood; for Paris who slew thy son Achilles, was brother to Hector, whose wife she was. And dost *thou* enter the same abode with her, and deign to let her share thy board, and suffer her to rear her brood of vipers in thy house? But I, after all this foresight for thee, old man, and myself, am to have her torn from my clutches for wishing to slay her. Yet come now, for 'tis no disgrace to argue; suppose my daughter has no child, while this woman's sons grow up, wilt thou set them up to rule the land of Phthia, barbarians born and bred to lord it over Hellenes? Am I then so void of sense because I hate injustice, and thou so full of cleverness? Consider yet another point; say thou hadst given a daughter of thine to some citizen, and hadst then seen her thus treated, wouldst thou have sat looking on in silence? I trow not. Dost thou then for a foreigner rail thus at thy nearest friends? Again, thou mayst say, husband and wife have an equally strong case if she is wronged by him, and similarly if he find her guilty of indiscretion in his house; yet while he has ample powers in his own hands, she depends on parents and friends for her case. Surely then I am right in helping my own kin! Thou art in thy dotage; for thou wilt do me more good by speaking of my generalship than by concealing it. Helen's trouble was not of her own choosing, but sent by heaven, and it proved a great benefit to Hellas; her sons, till then untried in war or arms, turned to deeds of prowess, and it is experience which teaches man all he knows. I showed my wisdom in refraining from slaying my wife, directly I caught sight of her. Would that thou too hadst ne'er slain Phocus! All this I bring before thee in pure

good-will, not from anger. But if thou resent it, thy tongue may wag till it ache, yet shall I gain by prudent forethought.

LEADER

Cease now from idle words, 'twere better far, for fear ye both alike go wrong.

PELEUS

Alas! what evil customs now prevail in Hellas! Whene'er the host sets up a trophy o'er the foe, men no more consider this the work of those who really toiled, but the general gets the credit for it. Now he was but one among ten thousand others to brandish his spear; he only did the work of one; but yet he wins more praise than they. Again, as magistrates in all the grandeur of office they scorn the common folk, though they are naught themselves; whereas those others are ten thousand times more wise than they, if daring combine with judgment. Even so thou and thy brother, exalted by the toilsome efforts of others, now take your seats in all the swollen pride of Trojan fame and Trojan generalship. But I will teach thee henceforth to consider Idaean Paris a foe less terrible than Peleus, unless forthwith thou pack from this roof, thou and thy childless daughter too, whom my own true son will hale through his halls by the hair of her head; for her barrenness will not let her endure fruitfulness in others, because she has no children herself. Still if misfortune prevents her bearing offspring, is that a reason why we should be left childless? Begone! ye varlets, let her go! I will soon see if anyone will hinder me from loosing her hands. (*to* ANDROMACHE) Arise; these trembling hands of mine will untie the twisted thongs that bind thee. Out on thee, coward! is this how thou hast galled her wrists? Didst think thou wert lashing up a lion or bull? or wert afraid she would snatch a sword and defend herself against thee? Come, child, nestle to thy mother's arms; help me loose her bonds; I will yet rear thee in Phthia to be their bitter foe. If your reputation for prowess and the battles ye have fought were taken from you Spartans, in all else, be very sure, you have not your inferiors.

LEADER

The race of old men practises no restraint; and their testiness makes it hard to check them.

MENELAUS

Thou art only too ready to rush into abuse; while, as for me, I came to Phthia by constraint and have therefore no intention either of doing or suffering anything mean. Now must I return home, for I have no time to waste; for there is a city not so very far from Sparta, which aforetime was friendly but now is hostile; against her will I march with my army

and bring her into subjection. And when I have arranged that matter as I wish, I will return; and face to face with my son-in-law I will give my version of the story and hear his. And if he punish her, and for the future she exercise self-control, she shall find me do the like; but if he storm, I'll storm as well; and every act of mine shall be a reflex of his own. As for thy babbling, I can bear it easily; for, like to a shadow as thou art, thy voice is all thou hast, and thou art powerless to do aught but talk.

(MENELAUS *and his retinue withdraw.*)

PELEUS

Lead on, my child, safe beneath my sheltering wing, and thou too, poor lady; for thou art come into a quiet haven after the rude storm.

ANDROMACHE

Heaven reward thee and all thy race, old sire, for having saved my child and me his hapless mother! Only beware lest they fall upon us twain in some lonely spot upon the road and force me from thee, when they see thy age, my weakness, and this child's tender years; take heed to this, that we be not a second time made captive, after escaping now.

PELEUS

Forbear such words, prompted by a woman's cowardice. Go on thy way; who will lay a finger on you? Methinks he will do it to his cost. For by heaven's grace I rule o'er many a knight and spearman bold in my kingdom of Phthia; yea, and myself can still stand straight, no bent old man as thou dost think; such a fellow as that a mere look from me will put to flight in spite of my years. For e'en an old man, be he brave, is worth a host of raw youths; for what avails a fine figure if a man is a coward?

(PELEUS, ANDROMACHE, *and* MOLOSSUS *go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Oh! to have never been born, or sprung from noble sires, the heir to mansions richly stored; for if aught untoward e'er befall, there is no lack of champions for sons of noble parents, and there is honour and glory for them when they are proclaimed scions of illustrious lines; time detracts not from the legacy these good men leave, but the light of their goodness still burns on when they are dead.

antistrophe

Better is it not to win a discreditable victory, than to make justice miscarry by an invidious exercise of power; for such a victory, though men think it sweet for the moment, grows barren in time and

comes near being a stain on a house. This is the life I commend, this the life I set before me as my ideal, to exercise no authority beyond what is right either in the marriage-chamber or in the state.

epode

O aged son of Aeacus! now am I sure that thou wert with the Lapithae, wielding thy famous spear, when they fought the Centaurs; and on Argo's deck didst pass the cheerless strait beyond the sea-beat Symplegades on her voyage famed; and when in days long gone the son of Zeus spread slaughter round Troy's famous town, thou too didst share his triumphant return to Europe.

(*The* NURSE OF HERMIONE *enters.*)

NURSE

Alas! good friends, what a succession of troubles is to-day provided us! My mistress Hermione within the house, deserted by her father and in remorse for her monstrous deed in plotting the death of Andromache and her child, is bent on dying; for she is afraid her husband will in requital for this expel her with dishonour from his house or put her to death, because she tried to slay the innocent. And the servants that watch her can scarce restrain her efforts to hang herself, scarce catch the sword and wrest it from her hand. So bitter is her anguish, and she hath recognized the villainy of her former deeds. As for me, friends, I am weary of keeping my mistress from the fatal noose; do ye go in and try to save her life; for if strangers come, they prove more persuasive than the friends of every day.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah yes! I hear an outcry in the house amongst the servants, confirming the news thou hast brought. Poor sufferer! she seems about to show a lively grief for her grave crimes; for she has escaped her servants' hands and is rushing from the house, eager to end her life.

(HERMIONE *enters, in agitation. She is carrying a sword which the* NURSE *wrests from her.*)

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Woe, woe is me! I will rend my hair and tear cruel furrows in my cheeks.

NURSE

My child, what wilt thou do? Wilt thou disfigure thyself?

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Ah me! ah me! Begone, thou fine-spun veil! float from my head away!

NURSE

Daughter, cover up thy bosom, fasten thy robe.

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Why should I cover it? My crimes against my lord are manifest and clear, they cannot be hidden.

NURSE

Art so grieved at having devised thy rival's death?

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Yea, I deeply mourn my fatal deeds of daring; alas! I am now accursed in all men's eyes!

NURSE

Thy husband will pardon thee this error.

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Oh! why didst thou hunt me to snatch away my sword? Give, oh! give it back, dear nurse, that I may thrust it through my heart Why dost thou prevent me hanging myself?

NURSE

What! was I to let thy madness lead thee on to death?

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Ah me, my destiny! Where can I find some friendly fire? To what rocky height can I climb above the sea or 'mid some wooded mountain glen, there to die and trouble but the dead?

NURSE

Why vex thyself thus? on all of us sooner or later heaven's visitation comes.

HERMIONE (*chanting*)

Thou hast left me, O my father, left me like a stranded bark, all alone, without an oar. My lord will surely slay me; no home is mine henceforth beneath my husband's roof. What god is there to whose statue I can as a suppliant haste? or shall I throw myself in slavish wise at slavish knees? Would I could speed away from Phthia's land on bird's dark pinion, or like that pine-built ship,[2] the first that ever sailed betwixt the rocks Cyanean!

NURSE

My child, I can as little praise thy previous sinful excesses, committed against the Trojan captive, as thy present exaggerated terror. Thy hus-

band will never listen to a barbarian's weak pleading and reject his marriage with thee for this. For thou wast no captive from Troy whom he wedded, but the daughter of a gallant sire, with a rich dower, from a city too of no mean prosperity. Nor will thy father forsake thee, as thou dreadest, and allow thee to be cast out from this house. Nay, enter now, nor show thyself before the palace, lest the sight of thee there bring reproach upon thee, my daughter.

(*The* NURSE *departs as* ORESTES *and his attendants enter.*)

LEADER

Lo! a stranger of foreign appearance from some other land comes hurrying towards us.

ORESTES

Women of this foreign land! is this the home, the palace of Achilles' son?

LEADER

Thou hast it; but who art thou to ask such a question?

ORESTES

The son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, by name Orestes, on my way to the oracle of Zeus at Dodona. But now that I am come to Phthia, I am resolved to inquire about my kinswoman, Hermione of Sparta; is she alive and well? for though she dwells in a land far from my own, I love her none the less.

HERMIONE

Son of Agamemnon, thy appearing is as a haven from the storm to sailors; by thy knees I pray, have pity on me in my distress, on me of whose fortunes thou art inquiring. About thy knees I twine my arms with all the force of sacred fillets.

ORESTES

Ha! what is this? Am I mistaken or do I really see before me the queen of this palace, the daughter of Menelaus?

HERMIONE

The same, that only child whom Helen, daughter of Tyndareus, bore my father in his halls; never doubt that.

ORESTES

O saviour Phoebus, grant us respite from our woe! But what is the matter? art thou afflicted by gods or men?

HERMIONE

Partly by myself, partly by the man who wedded me, and partly by some god. On every side I see ruin.

ORESTES

Why, what misfortune could happen to a woman as yet childless, unless her honour is concerned?

HERMIONE

My very ill! Thou hast hit my case exactly.

ORESTES

On whom has thy husband set his affections in thy stead?

HERMIONE

On his captive, Hector's wife.

ORESTES

An evil case indeed, for a man to have two wives!

HERMIONE

'Tis even thus. So I resented it.

ORESTES

Didst thou with woman's craft devise a plot against thy rival?

HERMIONE

Yes, to slay her and her bastard child.

ORESTES

And didst thou slay them, or did something happen to rescue them from thee?

HERMIONE

It was old Peleus, who showed regard to the weaker side.

ORESTES

Hadst thou any accomplice in this attempted murder?

HERMIONE

My father came from Sparta for this very purpose.

ORESTES

And was he after all defeated by that old man's prowess?

HERMIONE

Oh no! but by shame; and he hath gone and left me all alone.

ORESTES

I understand; thou art afraid of thy husband for what thou hast done.

HERMIONE

Thou hast guessed it; for he will have a right to slay me. What can I say for myself? Yet I beseech thee by Zeus the god of our family, send me to a land as far as possible from this, or to my father's house; for these very walls seem to cry out "Begone!" and all the land of Phthia hates me. But if my lord return ere that from the oracle of Phoebus, he will put me to death on a shameful charge, or enslave me to his mistress, whom I ruled before. Maybe some one will say, "How was it thou didst go thus astray?" I was ruined by evil women who came to me and puffed me up with words like these: "Wait! wilt thou suffer that vile captive, a mere bondmaid, to dwell within thy house and share thy wedded rights? By Heaven's queen! if it were my house she should not live to reap my marriage-harvest!" And I listened to the words of these Sirens, the cunning, knavish, subtle praters, and was filled with silly thoughts. What need had I to care about my lord? I had all I wanted, wealth in plenty, a house in which I was mistress, and as for children, mine would be born in wedlock, while hers would be bastards, half-slaves to mine. Oh! never, never, —this truth will I repeat,—should men of sense, who have wives, allow women-folk to visit them in their homes, for they teach them evil; one, to gain some private end, helps to corrupt their honour; another, having made a slip herself, wants a companion in misfortune, while many are wantons; and hence it is men's houses are tainted. Wherefore keep strict guard upon the portals of your houses with bolts and bars; for these visits of strange women lead to no good result, but a world of ill.

LEADER

Thou hast given thy tongue too free a rein regarding thy own sex. I can pardon thee in this case, but still women ought to smooth over their sisters' weaknesses.

ORESTES

'Twas sage counsel he gave who taught men to hear the arguments on both sides. I, for instance, though aware of the confusion in this house, the quarrel between thee and Hector's wife, waited awhile and watched to see whether thou wouldst stay here or from fear of that captive art minded to quit these halls. Now it was not so much regard for thy message that brought me thither, as the intention of carrying thee away from this house, if, as now, thou shouldst grant me a chance of saying so. For thou wert mine formerly, but art now living with thy present husband through thy father's baseness; since he, before invading Troy's domains, betrothed thee to me, and then afterwards promised thee to thy present lord, provided he captured the city of Troy.

So, as soon as Achilles' son returned hither, I forgave thy father, but entreated the bridegroom to forego his marriage with thee, telling him

all I had endured and my present misfortune; I might get a wife, I said, from amongst friends, but outside their circle 'twas no easy task for one exiled like myself from home. Thereat he grew abusive, taunting me with my mother's murder and those blood-boltered fiends.[3] And I was humbled by the fortunes of my house, and though 'tis true, I grieved, yet did I bear my sorrow, and reluctantly departed, robbed of thy promised hand. Now therefore, since thou findest thy fortune so abruptly changed and art fallen thus on evil days and hast no help, I will take thee hence and place thee in thy father's hands. For kinship hath strong claims, and in adversity there is naught better than a kinsman's kindly aid.

HERMIONE

As for my marriage, my father must look to it; 'tis not for me to decide. Yes, take me hence as soon as may be, lest my husband come back to his house before I am gone, or Peleus hear that I am deserting his son's abode and pursue me with his swift steeds.

ORESTES

Rest easy about the old man's power; and, as for Achilles' son with all his insolence to me, never fear him; such a crafty net this hand hath woven and set for his death with knots that none can loose; whereof I will not speak before the time, but, when my plot begins to work, Delphi's rock will witness it. If but my allies in the Pythian land abide by their oaths, this same murderer of his mother will show that no one else shall marry thee my rightful bride. To his cost will he demand satisfaction of King Phoebus for his father's blood; nor shall his repentance avail him, though he is now submitting to the god. No! he shall perish miserably by Apollo's hand and my false accusations; so shall he find out my enmity. For the deity upsets the fortune of them that hate him, and suffers them not to be high-minded.

(ORESTES *and* HERMIONE *depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Phoebus! who didst fence the hill of Ilium with a fair coronal of towers, and thou, ocean-god! coursing o'er the main with thy dark steeds, wherefore did ye hand over in dishonour your own handiwork to the war-god, master of the spear, abandoning Troy to wretchedness?

antistrophe 1

Many a well-horsed car ye yoked on the banks of Simois, and many a bloody tournament did ye ordain with never a prize to win; and Ilium's princes are dead and gone; no longer in Troy is seen the blaze of fire on altars of the gods with the smoke of incense.

strophe 2

The son of Atreus is no more, slain by the hand of his wife, and she herself hath paid the debt of blood by death, and from her children's hands received her doom. The god's own bidding from his oracle was levelled against her, in the day that Agamemnon's son set forth from Argos and visited his shrine; so he slew her, aye, spilt his own mother's blood. O Phoebus, O thou power divine, how can I believe the story?

antistrophe 2

Anon wherever Hellenes gather, was heard the voice of lamentation, mothers weeping o'er their children's fate, as they left their homes to mate with strangers. Ah! thou art not the only one, nor thy dear ones either, on whom the cloud of grief hath fallen. Hellas had to bear the visitation, and thence the scourge crossed to Phrygia's fruitful fields, raining the bloody drops the death-god loves.

(PELEUS *enters in haste.*)

PELEUS

Ye dames of Phthia, answer my questions. I heard a vague rumour that the daughter of Menelaus had left these halls and fled; so now am I come in hot haste to learn if this be true; for it is the duty of those who are at home to labour in the interests of their absent friends.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Thou hast heard aright, O Peleus; ill would it become me to hide the evil case in which I now find myself; our queen has fled and left these halls.

PELEUS

What did she fear? explain that to me.

LEADER

She was afraid her lord would cast her out.

PELEUS

In return for plotting his child's death? surely not?

LEADER

Yea, and she was afraid of yon captive.

PELEUS

With whom did she leave the house? with her father?

LEADER

The son of Agamemnon came and took her hence.

PELEUS

What view hath he to further thereby? Will he marry her?

LEADER

Yes, and he is plotting thy grandson's death.

PELEUS

From an ambuscade, or meeting him fairly face to face?

LEADER

In the holy place of Loxias, leagued with Delphians.

PELEUS

God help us. This is a present danger. Hasten one of you with all speed to the Pythian altar and tell our friends there what has happened here, ere Achilles' son be slain by his enemies.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Woe worth the day! what evil tidings have I brought for thee, old sire, and for all who love my master! woe is me!

PELEUS

Alas! my prophetic soul hath a presentiment.

MESSENGER

Aged Peleus, hearken! Thy grandson is no more; so grievously is he smitten by the men of Delphi and the stranger from Mycenae.

LEADER

Ah! what wilt thou do, old man? Fall not; uplift thyself.

PELEUS

I am a thing of naught; death is come upon me. My voice is choked, my limbs droop beneath me.

MESSENGER

Hearken; if thou art eager also to avenge thy friends, lift up thyself and hear what happened.

PELEUS

Ah, destiny! how tightly hast thou caught me in thy toils, a poor old man at life's extremest verge! But tell me how he was taken from me, my one son's only child; unwelcome as such news is, I fain would hear it.

MESSENGER

As soon as we reached the famous soil of Phoebus, for three whole days were we feasting our eyes with the sight. And this, it seems, caused suspicion; for the folk, who dwell near the god's shrine, began to collect in groups, while Agamemnon's son, going to and fro through the town, would whisper in each man's ear malignant hints: "Do ye see yon fellow, going in and out of the god's treasure-chambers, which are full of the gold stored there by all mankind? He is come hither a second time on the same mission as before, eager to sack the temple of Phoebus." Thereon there ran an angry murmur through the city, and the magistrates flocked to their council-chamber, while those, who have charge of the god's treasures, had a guard privately placed amongst the colonnades. But we, knowing naught as yet of this, took sheep fed in the pastures of Parnassus, and went our way and stationed ourselves at the altars with vouchers and Pythian seers. And one said: "What prayer, young warrior, wouldst thou have us offer to the god? Wherefore art thou come?" And he answered: "I wish to make atonement to Phoebus for my past transgression; for once I claimed from him satisfaction for my father's blood." Thereupon the rumour, spread by Orestes, proved to have great weight, suggesting that my master was lying and had come on a shameful errand. But he crosses the threshold of the temple to pray to Phoebus before his oracle, and was busy with his burnt-offering; when a body of men armed with swords set themselves in ambush against him in the cover of the bay-trees, and Clytemnestra's son, that had contrived the whole plot was one of them. There stood the young man praying to the god in sight of all, when lo! with their sharp swords they stabbed Achilles' unprotected son from behind. But he stepped back, for it was not a mortal wound he had received, and drew his sword, and snatching armour from the pegs where it hung on a pillar, took his stand upon the altar-steps, the picture of a warrior grim; then cried he to the sons of Delphi, and asked them: "Why seek to slay me when I am come on a holy mission? What cause is there why I should die?" But of all that throng of bystanders, no man answered him a word, but they set to hurling stones. Then he, though bruised and battered by the showers of missiles from all sides, covered himself behind his mail and tried to ward off the attack, holding his shield first here, then there, at arm's length, but all of no avail; for a storm of darts, arrows and javelins, hurtling spits with double points, and butchers' knives for slaying steers, came flying at his feet; and terrible was the war-dance thou hadst then seen thy grandson dance to avoid their marksmanship. At last, when they were hemming him in on all sides, allowing him no breathing space, he left the shelter of the altar, the hearth where victims are placed, and with one bound was on them as on the Trojans of yore; and they turned and fled like doves when they see the hawk. Many fell in the confusion; some

wounded, and others trodden down by one another along the narrow passages; and in that hushed holy house uprose unholy din and echoed back from the rocks. Calm and still my master stood there in his gleaming harness like a flash of light, till from the inmost shrine there came a voice of thrilling horror, stirring the crowd to make a stand. Then fell Achilles' son, smitten through the flank by some Delphian's biting blade, some fellow that slew him with a host to help; and as he fell, there was not one that did not stab him, or cast a rock and batter his corpse. So his whole body, once so fair, was marred with savage wounds. At last they cast the lifeless clay, lying near the altar, forth from the fragrant fane. And we gathered up his remains forthwith and are bringing them to thee, old prince, to mourn and weep and honour with a deep-dug tomb.

This is how that prince who vouchsafeth oracles to others, that judge of what is right for all the world, hath revenged himself on Achilles' son, remembering his ancient quarrel as a wicked man would. How then can he be wise?

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws as the body of Neoptolemus is carried in on a bier. The following lines between* PELEUS *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Lo! e'en now our prince is being carried on a bier from Delphi's land unto his home. Woe for him and his sad fate, and woe for thee, old sire! for this is not the welcome thou wouldst give Achilles' son, the lion's whelp; thyself too by this sad mischance dost share his evil lot.

PELEUS

Ah! woe is me! here is a sad sight for me to see and take unto my halls! Ah me! ah me! I am undone, thou city of Thessaly! My line now ends; I have no children left me in my home. Oh! the sorrows I seem born to endure! What friend can I look to for relief? Ah, dear lips, and cheeks, and hands! Would thy destiny had slain thee 'neath Ilium's walls beside the banks of Simois!

CHORUS

Had he so died, my aged lord, he had won him honour thereby, and thine had been the happier lot.

PELEUS

O marriage, marriage, woe to thee! thou bane of my home, thou destroyer of my city! Ah my child, my boy, would that the honour of wedding thee, fraught with evil as it was to my children and house, had not thrown o'er thee, my son, Hermione's deadly net! O

that the thunderbolt had slain her sooner! and that thou, rash mortal, hadst never charged the great god Phoebus with aiming that murderous shaft that spilt thy hero-father's blood!

CHORUS

Woe! woe! alas! With due observance of funeral rites will I begin the mourning for my dead master.

PELEUS

Alack and well-a-day! I take up the tearful dirge, ah me! old and wretched as I am.

CHORUS

'Tis Heaven's decree; God willed this heavy stroke.

PELEUS

O darling child, thou hast left me all alone in my halls, old and childless by thy loss.

CHORUS

Thou shouldst have died, old sire, before thy children.

PELEUS

Shall I not tear my hair, and smite upon my head with grievous blows? O city! of both my children hath Phoebus robbed me.

CHORUS

What evils thou hast suffered, what sorrows thou hast seen, thou poor old man! what shall be thy life hereafter?

PELEUS

Childless, desolate, with no limit to my grief, I must drain the cup of woe, until I die.

CHORUS

'Twas all in vain the gods wished thee joy on thy wedding day.

PELEUS

All my hopes have flown away, fallen short of my high boasts.

CHORUS

A lonely dweller in a lonely home art thou.

PELEUS

I have no city any longer; there! on the ground my sceptre do I cast; and thou, daughter of Nereus, 'neath thy dim grotto, shalt see me grovelling in the dust, a ruined king.

CHORUS

Look, look! (*A dim form of divine appearance is seen hovering in mid air.*) What is that moving? what influence divine am I conscious of? Look, maidens, mark it well; see, yonder is some deity, wafted through the lustrous air and alighting on the plains of Phthia, home of steeds.

THETIS (*from above*)

O Peleus! because of my wedded days with thee now long agone, I Thetis am come from the halls of Nereus. And first I counsel thee not to grieve to excess in thy present distress, for I too who need ne'er have borne children to my sorrow, have lost the child of our love, Achilles swift of foot, foremost of the sons of Hellas. Next will I declare why I am come, and do thou give ear. Carry yonder corpse, Achilles' son, to the Pythian altar and there bury it, a reproach to Delphi, that his tomb may proclaim the violent death he met at the hand of Orestes. And for his captive wife Andromache,—she must dwell in the Molossian land, united in honourable wedlock with Helenus, and with her this babe, the sole survivor as he is of all the line of Aeacus, for from him a succession of prosperous kings of Molossia is to go on unbroken; for the race that springs from thee and me, my aged lord, must not thus be brought to naught; no! nor Troy's line either; for her fate too is cared for by the gods, albeit her fall was due to the eager wish of Pallas. Thee too, that thou mayst know the saving grace of wedding me, will I, a goddess born and daughter of a god, release from all the ills that flesh is heir to and make a deity to know not death nor decay. From henceforth in the halls of Nereus shalt thou dwell with me, god and goddess together; thence shalt thou rise dry-shod from out the main and see Achilles, our dear son, settled in his island-home by the strand of Leuce, that is girdled by the Euxine sea. But get thee to Delphi's god-built town, carrying this corpse with thee, and, after thou hast buried him, return and settle in the cave which time hath hollowed in the Sepian rock and there abide, till from the sea I come with choir of fifty Nereids to be thy escort thence; for fate's decree thou must fulfil; such is the pleasure of Zeus. Cease then to mourn the dead; this is the lot which heaven assigns to all, and all must pay their debt to death.

PELEUS

Great queen, my honoured wife, from Nereus sprung, all hail! thou art acting herein as befits thyself and thy children. So I will stay my grief at thy bidding, goddess, and, when I have buried the dead, will seek the glens of Pelion, even the place where I took thy beauteous form to my embrace. Surely after this every prudent man will seek to marry a wife of noble stock and give his daughter to a husband good and true, never setting his

heart on a worthless woman, not even though she bring a sumptuous dowry to his house. So would men ne'er suffer ill at heaven's hand.

(THETIS *vanishes.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Many are the shapes of Heaven's denizens, and many a thing they bring to pass contrary to our expectation; that which we thought would be is not accomplished, while for the unexpected God finds out a way. E'en such hath been the issue of this matter.[4]

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 79, 179, 238, 333, 352, 370, 403, 480, 482, 648, 662, 713, 784, 795, 826, 837, 906, 930, 946, 953, 973, 980, 983, 992, 1056–1057, 1066.

1. Coleridge's note to this line runs: "Neoptolemus demanded satisfaction for his father's death because Apollo directed the fatal arrow of Paris which killed Achilles."

2. *i.e.*, the Argo.

3. *i.e.*, the Furies.

4. These lines are found likewise at the conclusion of the *Alcestis*, *Helen*, *The Bacchae*, and, with a slight addition, the *Medea*.

VI
THE HERACLEIDAE

Characters in the Play

Iolaus, *friend of Heracles*
Copreus, *herald of* Eurystheus
Demophon, *King of Athens*
Macaria, *daughter of Heracles*
Servant, *of Hyllus, son of Heracles*
Alcmena, *mother of Heracles*
Messenger
Eurystheus, *King of Argos*
Chorus of Aged Athenians
Acamas, the brother of Demophon, *younger sons of Heracles, attendants, guards, etc.*

INTRODUCTION

LIKE the *Andromache*, *The Heracleidae* reflects the contemporary events of the war between Athens and Sparta. Though the play cannot be exactly dated, most critics agree that it must have appeared during the earlier years of the conflict. A spirit of intense national patriotism pervades the piece, and Athens is glorified both implicitly and explicitly, first by laying the scene at Marathon, next by stressing the traditional Athenian piety towards the gods, her democratic institutions, the essential nobility of her citizens, and finally her willingness to protect the weak. There can be no doubt that Euripides' preoccupation with this patriotic purpose accounts for the inferior dramatic structure of the play.

In a characteristic Euripidean prologue, Iolaus, an old companion of Heracles, sketches the situation at the beginning of the drama. The children of Heracles, protected only by Alcmena, Heracles' mother, and Iolaus, have sought refuge at the temple of Zeus in Marathon in their effort to flee from their father's ancient and violent enemy, Eurystheus. The latter after Heracles' death desired to slay them, but they and their guardians managed to escape from Argos, and have vainly sought protection from one state in Greece after another, since Eurystheus has relentlessly pursued them. The action of the play records how Athens successfully defended the fugitives.

If the central principle of unity for the play lies in the glorification of Athens, Euripides has allowed certain extraneous elements to creep into its composition. For example, he introduces the motif of Macaria's sacrifice. Demophon, the Athenian king, reports that a maiden born of a noble sire must be immolated if the Athenian arms are to succeed against the attack of Eurystheus. Macaria willingly offers to give up her life on these terms, and after a farewell speech, replete with genuine pathos, leaves the scene, but Euripides makes no further reference to her in the remainder of the play, except perhaps in one place where the text is dubious (line 822). Likewise the half-comic scene of the arming of old Iolaus seems to strike a discordant note, though the passage may be an abortive attempt at pathos. Furthermore it is difficult to determine why Eurystheus, the arch-villain at the beginning of the play, suddenly be-

comes a most sympathetic figure at the end when he courageously faces death. Or again, we cannot understand why Alcmena in the same closing scene exhibits a painful gloating vindictiveness, for which we are completely unprepared. Various suggestions have been made to explain these difficulties. One critic has urged that the piece was written as a substitute for a Satyr-play, like the *Alcestis*. Others have argued that the text is now incomplete and that the complete version had not only fuller choral passages, but also contained an account of Macaria's death similar to Talthybius' report of Polyxena's fate in the *Hecuba*. As the play now stands, it leaves much to be desired, since its general patriotic tone does not sufficiently compensate for its dramatic flaws and its lack of unity. One therefore may easily understand why the play has not enjoyed wide popularity.

THE HERACLEIDAE

(SCENE:—*Before the altar and temple of Zeus at Marathon.* IOLAUS, *an old man, and the children of Heracles are seen on the steps of the altar.*)

IOLAUS

I HOLD this true, and long have held: Nature hath made one man upright for his neighbours' good, while another hath a disposition wholly given over to gain, useless alike to the state and difficult to have dealings with, but for himself the best of men; and this I know, not from mere hearsay. For I, from pure regard and reverence for my kith and kin, though I might have lived at peace in Argos, alone of all my race shared with Heracles his labours, while he was yet with us, and now that he dwells in heaven, I keep these his children safe beneath my wing, though myself I need protection. For when their father passed from earth away, Eurystheus would first of all have slain us, but we escaped. And though our home is lost, our life was saved. But in exile we wander from city to city, ever forced to roam. For, added to our former wrongs, Eurystheus thought it fit to put this further outrage upon us: wheresoe'er he heard that we were settling, thither would he send heralds demanding our surrender and driving us from thence, holding out this threat, that Argos is no mean city to make a friend or foe, and furthermore pointing to his own prosperity. So they, seeing how weak my means, and these little ones left without a father, bow to his superior might and drive us from their land. And I share the exile of these children, and help them bear their evil lot by my sympathy, loth to betray them, lest someone say, "Look you! now that the children's sire is dead, Iolaus no more protects them, kinsman though he is." Not one corner left us in the whole of Hellas, we are come to Marathon and its neighbouring land, and here we sit as suppliants at the altars of the gods, and pray their aid; for 'tis said two sons of Theseus dwell upon these plains, the lot of their inheritance, scions of Pandion's stock, related to these children; this the reason we have come on this our way to the borders of glorious Athens. To lead the flight two aged guides are we; my care is centred on these boys, while she, I mean Alcmena, clasps her son's daughter in her arms, and bears her for safety within

this shrine, for we shrink from letting tender maidens come anigh the crowd or stand as suppliants at the altar. Now Hyllus and the elder of his brethren are seeking some place for us to find a refuge, if we are driven by force from this land. O children, children, come hither! hold unto my robe; for lo! I see a herald coming towards us from Eurystheus, by whom we are persecuted, wanderers excluded from every land. A curse on thee and him that sent thee, hateful wretch! for that same tongue of thine hath oft announced its master's evil hests to these children's noble sire as well.

(COPREUS, *the herald of* EURYSTHEUS, *enters.*)

COPREUS

Doubtless thy folly lets thee think this is a good position to have taken up, and that thou art come to a city that will help thee. No! there is none that will prefer thy feeble arm to the might of Eurystheus. Begone! why take this trouble? Thou must arise and go to Argos, where awaits thee death by stoning.

IOLAUS

Not so, for the god's altar will protect me, and this land of freedom, wherein we have set foot.

COPREUS

Wilt give me the trouble of laying hands on thee?

IOLAUS

By force at least shalt thou never drag these children hence.

COPREUS

That shalt thou soon learn; it seems thou wert a poor prophet, after all, in this.

(COPREUS *seizes the children.*)

IOLAUS

This shall never happen while I live.

COPREUS

Begone! for I will take them hence, for all thy refusals, for I hold that they belong to Eurystheus, as they do indeed.

(*He throws* IOLAUS *to the ground.*)

IOLAUS

Help, ye who long have had your home in Athens! we suppliants at Zeus' altar in your market-place are being haled by force away, our sacred wreaths defiled, shame to your city, to the gods dishonour.

(*The* CHORUS OF AGED ATHENIANS *enters.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hark, hark! What cry is this that rises near the altar? At once explain the nature of the trouble.

IOLAUS

See this aged frame hurled in its feebleness upon the ground! Woe is me!

LEADER

Who threw thee down thus pitiably?

IOLAUS

Behold the man who flouts your gods, kind sirs, and tries by force to drag me from my seat before the altar of Zeus.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

From what land, old stranger, art thou come to this confederate state of four cities? or have ye left Euboea's cliffs, and, with the oar that sweeps the sea, put in here from across the firth?

IOLAUS

Sirs, no island life I lead, but from Mycenae to thy land I come.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What do they call thee, aged sir, those folk in Mycenae?

IOLAUS

Maybe ye have heard of Iolaus, the comrade of Heracles, for he was not unknown to fame.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Yea, I have heard of him in bygone days; but tell me, whose are the tender boys thou bearest in thine arms?

IOLAUS

These, sirs, are the sons of Heracles, come as suppliants to you and your city.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

What is their quest? Are they anxious, tell me, to obtain an audience of the state?

IOLAUS

That so they may escape surrender, nor be torn with violence from thy altars, and brought to Argos.

COPREUS

Nay, this will nowise satisfy thy masters, who o'er thee have a right, and so have tracked thee hither.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Stranger, 'tis but right we should reverence the gods' suppliants, suffering none with violent hand to make them leave the altars, for that will dread Justice ne'er permit.

COPREUS

Do thou then drive these subjects of Eurystheus forth, and this hand of mine shall abstain from violence.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

'Twere impious for the state to neglect the suppliant stranger's prayer.

COPREUS

Yet 'tis well to keep clear of troubles, by adopting that counsel, which is the wiser.

LEADER

Thou then shouldst have told the monarch of this land thy errand before being so bold, out of regard to his country's freedom, instead of trying to drag strangers by force from the altars of the gods.

COPREUS

Who is monarch of this land and state?

LEADER

Demophon, son of gallant Theseus.

COPREUS

Surely it were most to the purpose to discuss this matter somewhat with him; all else has been said in vain.

LEADER

Lo! here he comes in person, in hot haste, and Acamas his brother, to hear what thou hast to say.

(DEMOPHON, *Acamas, and their retinue enter.*)

DEMOPHON

Since thou for all thy years hast outstripped younger men in coming to the rescue to this altar of Zeus, do thou tell me what hath chanced to bring this crowd together.

LEADER

There sit the sons of Heracles as suppliants, having wreathed the altar, as thou seest, O king, and with them is Iolaus, trusty comrade of their sire.

DEMOPHON

Why should this event have called for cries of pain?

LEADER (*turning to* COPREUS)

This fellow caused the uproar by trying to drag them forcibly from this altar, and he hurled down the old man, till my tears for pity flowed.

DEMOPHON

Hellenic dress and fashion in his robes doth he no doubt adopt, but deeds like these betray the barbarian. Thou, sirrah, tell me straight the country whence thou camest thither.

COPREUS

An Argive I; since that thou seek'st to know. Who sent me, and the object of my coming, will I freely tell. Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, sends me hither to fetch these back; and I have come, sir stranger, with just grounds in plenty, alike for speech or action. An Argive myself, Argives I come to fetch, taking with me these runaways from my native city, on whom the doom of death was passed by our laws there; and we have a right, since we rule our city independently, to ratify its sentences. And though they have come as suppliants to the altars of numerous others, we have taken our stand on these same arguments, and no one has ventured to bring upon himself evils of his own getting. But they have come hither, either because they perceived some folly in thee, or, in their perplexity, staking all on one risky throw to win or lose; for surely they do not suppose that thou, if so thou hast thy senses still, and only thou, in all the breadth of Hellas they have traversed, wilt pity their foolish troubles. Come now, put argument against argument: what will be thy gain, suppose thou admit them to thy land, or let us take them hence? From us these benefits are thine to win: this city can secure as friends Argos, with its far-reaching arm, and Eurystheus' might complete; whilst if thou lend an ear to their piteous pleading and grow soft, the matter must result in trial of arms; for be sure we shall not yield this struggle without appealing to the sword. What pretext wilt thou urge? Of what domains art thou robbed that thou shouldst take and wage war with the Tirynthian Argives? What kind of allies art thou aiding? For whom will they have fallen whom thou buriest? Surely thou wilt get an evil name from the citizens, if for the sake of an old man near the grave, a mere shadow I may say, and for these children, thou wilt plunge into troublous

waters. The best thou canst say is, that thou wilt find in them a hope, and nothing more; and yet this falls far short of the present need; for these would be but a poor match for Argives even when fully armed and in their prime, if haply that raises thy spirits; moreover, the time 'twixt now and then is long, wherein ye may be blotted out. Nay, hearken to me; give me naught, but let me take mine own, and so gain Mycenae; but forbear to act now, as is your Athenian way, and take the weaker side, when it is in thy power to choose the stronger as thy friends.

LEADER

Who can decide a cause or ascertain its merits, till from both sides he clearly learn what they would say?

IOLAUS

O king, in thy land I start with this advantage, the right to hear and speak in turn, and none, ere that, will drive me hence as elsewhere they would. 'Twixt us and him is naught in common, for we no longer have aught to do with Argos since that decree was passed, but we are exiles from our native land; how then can he justly drag us back as subjects of Mycenae, seeing that they have banished us? For we are strangers. Or do ye claim that every exile from Argos is exiled from the bounds of Hellas? Not from Athens surely; for ne'er will she for fear of Argos drive the children of Heracles from her land. Here is no Trachis, not at all; no! nor that Achaean town, whence thou, defying justice, but boasting of the might of Argos in the very words thou now art using, didst drive the suppliants from their station at the altar. If this shall be, and they thy words approve, why then I trow this is no more Athens, the home of freedom. Nay, but I know the temper and nature of these citizens; they would rather die, for honour ranks before mere life with men of worth. Enough of Athens! for excessive praise is apt to breed disgust; and oft ere now I have myself felt vexed at praise that knows no bounds. But to thee, as ruler of this land, I fain would show the reason why thou art bound to save these children. Pittheus was the son of Pelops; from him sprung Aethra, and from her Theseus thy sire was born. And now will I trace back these children's lineage for thee. Heracles was son of Zeus and Alcmena; Alcmena sprang from Pelops' daughter; therefore thy father and their father would be the sons of first cousins. Thus then art thou to them related, O Demophon, but thy just debt to them beyond the ties of kinship do I now declare to thee; for I assert, in days gone by, I was with Theseus on the ship, as their father's squire, when they went to fetch that girdle fraught with death; [1] yea, and from Hades' murky dungeons did Heracles bring thy father up; as all Hellas doth attest. Wherefore in return they crave this boon of thee, that they be not surrendered up nor torn by force from the altars of thy gods and cast forth from the land. For this were

shame on thee, and hurtful likewise in thy state, should suppliants, exiles, kith and kin of thine, be haled away by force. In pity cast one glance at them. I do entreat thee, laying my suppliant bough upon thee, by thy hands and beard, slight not the sons of Heracles, now that thou hast them in thy power to help. Show thyself their kinsman and their friend; be to them father, brother, lord; for better each and all of these than to fall beneath the Argives' hand.

LEADER

O king, I pity them, hearing their sad lot. Now more than ever do I see noble birth o'ercome by fortune; for these, though sprung from a noble sire, are suffering what they ne'er deserved.

DEMOPHON

Three aspects of the circumstance constrain me, Iolaus, not to spurn the guests thou bringest; first and foremost, there is Zeus, at whose altar thou art seated with these tender children gathered round thee; next come ties of kin, and the debt I owe to treat them kindly for their father's sake; and last, mine honour, which before all I must regard; for if I permit this altar to be violently despoiled by stranger hands, men will think the land I inhabit is free no more, and that through fear I have surrendered suppliants to Argives, and this comes nigh to make one hang oneself. Would that thou hadst come under a luckier star! yet, as it is, fear not that any man shall tear thee and these children from the altar by force. (*to* COPREUS) Get thee to Argos and tell Eurystheus so; yea and more, if he have any charge against these strangers, he shall have justice; but never shalt thou drag them hence.

COPREUS

Not even if I have right upon my side and prove my case?

DEMOPHON

How can it be right to drag the suppliant away by force?

COPREUS

Well, mine is the disgrace; no harm will come to thee.

DEMOPHON

'Tis harm to me, if I let them be haled away by thee.

COPREUS

Banish them thyself, and then will I take them from elsewhere.

DEMOPHON

Nature made thee a fool, to think thou knowest better than the god.

COPREUS
It seems then evildoers are to find a refuge here.

DEMOPHON
A temple of the gods is an asylum open to the world.

COPREUS
Maybe they will not take this view in Mycenae.

DEMOPHON
What! am I not lord of this domain?

COPREUS
So long as thou injure not the Argives, and if wise, thou wilt not.

DEMOPHON
Be injured for all I care, provided I sin not against the gods.

COPREUS
I would not have thee come to blows with Argos.

DEMOPHON
I am of like mind in this; but I will not dismiss these from my protection.

COPREUS
For all that, I shall take and drag my own away.

DEMOPHON
Why then perhaps thou wilt find a difficulty in returning to Argos.

COPREUS
That shall I soon find out by making the attempt.

DEMOPHON
Touch them and thou shalt rue it, and that without delay.

LEADER
I conjure thee, never dare to strike a herald.

DEMOPHON
Strike I will, unless that herald learn discretion.

LEADER
Depart; and thou, O king, touch him not.

COPREUS

I go; for 'tis feeble fighting with a single arm. But I will come again, bringing hither a host of Argive troops, spearmen clad in bronze; for countless warriors are awaiting my return, and king Eurystheus in person at their head; anxiously he waits the issue here on the borders of Alcathous' realm. And when he hears thy haughty answer, he will burst upon thee, and thy citizens, on this land and all that grows therein; for all in vain should we possess such hosts of picked young troops in Argos, should we forbear to punish thee.

(COPREUS *departs.*)

DEMOPHON

Perdition seize thee! I am not afraid of thy Argos. Be very sure thou shalt not drag these suppliants hence by force, to my shame; for I hold not this city subject unto Argos, but independently.

CHORUS (*singing*)

'Tis time to use our forethought, ere the host of Argos approach our frontier, for exceeding fierce are the warriors of Mycenae, and in the present case still more than heretofore. For all heralds observe this custom, to exaggerate what happened twofold. Bethink thee what a tale he will tell his master of his dreadful treatment, how he came near losing his life altogether.

IOLAUS

Children have no fairer prize than this, the being born of a good and noble sire, and the power to wed from noble families; but whoso is enslaved by passion and makes a lowborn match, I cannot praise for leaving to his children a legacy of shame, to gratify himself. For noble birth offers a stouter resistance to adversity than base parentage; for we, in the last extremity of woe, have found friends and kinsmen here, the only champions of these children through all the length and breadth of this Hellenic world. Give, children, give to them your hand, and they the same to you; draw near to them. Ah! children, we have made trial of our friends, and if ever ye see the path that leads you back to your native land, and possess your home and the honours of your father, count them ever as your friends and saviours, and never lift against their land the foeman's spear, in memory of this, but hold this city first midst those ye love. Yea, they well deserve your warm regard, in that they have shifted from our shoulders to their own the enmity of so mighty a land as Argos and its people, though they saw we were vagabonds and beggars; still they did not give us up nor drive us forth. So while I live, and after death,—come when it will,—loudly will I sing thy praise, good friend, and will extol thee as I stand at Theseus' side, and cheer his heart, as I tell how

thou didst give kind welcome and protection to the sons of Heracles, and how nobly thou dost preserve thy father's fame through the length of Hellas, and hast not fallen from the high estate to which thy father brought thee, a lot which few others can boast; for 'mongst the many wilt thou find one maybe, that is not degenerate from his sire.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This land is ever ready in an honest cause to aid the helpless. Wherefore ere now it hath endured troubles numberless for friends, and now in this I see a struggle nigh at hand.

DEMOPHON

Thou hast spoken well, and I feel confident their conduct will be such; our kindness will they not forget. Now will I muster the citizens and set them in array, that I may receive Mycenae's host with serried ranks. But first will I send scouts to meet them, lest they fall upon me unawares; for at Argos every man is prompt to answer to the call, and I will assemble prophets and ordain a sacrifice. But do thou leave the altar of Zeus and go with the children into the house; for there are those who will care for thee, even though I be abroad. Enter then my house, old man.

IOLAUS

I will not leave the altar. Let us sit here still, praying for the city's fair success, and when thou hast made a glorious end of this struggle, will we go unto the house; nor are the gods who champion us weaker than the gods of Argos, O king; Hera, wife of Zeus, is their leader; Athena ours. And this I say is an omen of success, that we have the stronger deity, for Pallas will not brook defeat.

(DEMOPHON *and his retinue go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Though loud thy boasts, there be others care no more for thee for that, O stranger from the land of Argos; nor wilt thou scare my soul with swelling words. Not yet be this the fate of mighty Athens, beauteous town! But thou art void of sense, and so is he, who lords it o'er Argos, the son of Sthenelus,

antistrophe

thou that comest to another state, in no wise weaker than Argos, and, stranger that thou art, wouldst drag away by force suppliants of the gods, wanderers that cling to my land for help, refusing to yield to our king, nor yet having any honest plea to urge. How can such conduct count as honourable, at least in wise men's judgment?

epode

I am for peace myself; yet I tell thee, wicked king, although thou come unto my city, thou shalt not get so easily what thou expectest. Thou art not the only man to wield a sword or targe with plates of brass. Nay, thou eager warrior, I warn thee, bring not war's alarms against our lovely town; restrain thyself.

(DEMOPHON *re-enters.*)

IOLAUS

My son, why, prithee, art thou returned with that anxious look? Hast thou news of the enemy? Are they coming, are they here, or what thy tidings? For of a surety yon herald will not play us false. No! sure I am their captain, prosperous heretofore, will come, with thoughts exceeding proud against Athens. But Zeus doth punish overweening pride.

DEMOPHON

The host of Argos is come, and Eurystheus its king; my own eyes saw him, for the man who thinks he knows good generalship must see the foe not by messengers alone. As yet, however, he hath not sent his host into the plain, but, camped upon a rocky brow, is watching—I only tell thee what I think this means—to see by which road to lead his army hither without fighting, and how to take up a safe position in this land. However, all my plans are by this time carefully laid; the city is under arms, the victims stand ready to be slain to every god, whose due this is; my seers have filled the town with sacrifices, to turn the foe to flight and keep our country safe. All those who chant prophetic words have I assembled, and have examined ancient oracles, both public and secret, as means to save this city. And though the several answers differ in many points, yet in one is the sentiment of all clearly the same; they bid me sacrifice to Demeter's daughter some maiden from a noble father sprung. Now I, though in your cause I am as zealous as thou seest, yet will not slay my child, nor will I compel any of my subjects to do so against his will; for who of his own will doth harbour such an evil thought as to yield with his own hands the child he loves? And now thou mayest see angry gatherings, where some declare, 'tis right to stand by suppliant strangers, while others charge me with folly; but if I do this deed, a civil war is then and there at hand. Do thou then look to this and help to find a way to save yourselves and this country without causing me to be slandered by the citizens. For I am no despot like a barbarian monarch; but provided I do what is just, just will my treatment be.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Can it be that heaven forbids this city to help strangers, when it hath the will and longing so to do?

IOLAUS

My children, we are even as those mariners, who have escaped the storm's relentless rage, and have the land almost within their reach, but after all are driven back from shore by tempests to the deep again. Even so we, just as we reach the shore in seeming safety, are being thrust back from this land. Ah me! Why, cruel hope, didst thou then cheer my heart, though thou didst not mean to make the boon complete? The king may well be pardoned, if he will not slay his subjects' children; and with my treatment here I am content; if indeed 'tis heaven's will, I thus should fare, still is my gratitude to thee in no wise lost. Children, I know not what to do for you. Whither shall we turn? for what god's altar have we left uncrowned? to what fenced city have we failed to go? Ruin and surrender are our instant lot, poor children! If I must die, 'tis naught to me, save that thereby I give those foes of mine some cause for joy. But you, children, I lament and pity, and that aged mother of your sire, Alcmena. Ah, woe is thee for thy long span of life! and woe is me for all my idle toil! 'Twas after all our destined doom to fall into the hands of our hated foe, and die a death of shame and misery. But lend me thine aid, thou knowest how; for all hope of these children's safety has not yet left me. Give me up instead of them to the Argives, O king; run no risk, but let me save the children; to love my life becomes me not; let it pass. Me will Eurystheus be most glad to take and treat despitefully, as I was Heracles' companion; for the man is but a boor; wherefore wise men ought to pray to get a wise man for their foe, and not a proud senseless fool; for so, even if by fortune flouted, one would meet with much consideration.

LEADER

Old man, blame not this city; for though perhaps a gain to us, yet would it be a foul reproach that we betrayed strangers.

DEMOPHON

A generous scheme is thine, but impossible. 'Tis not in quest of thee yon king comes marching hither; what would Eurystheus gain by the death of one so old? Nay, 'tis these children's blood he wants. For there is danger to a foe in the youthful scions of a noble race, whose memory dwells upon their father's wrongs; all this Eurystheus must foresee. But if thou hast any scheme besides, that better suits the time, be ready with it, for, since I heard that oracle, I am at a loss and full of fear.

(MACARIA *enters from the temple.*)

MACARIA

Sirs, impute not boldness to me, because I venture forth; this shall be my first request, for a woman's fairest crown is this, to practise silence and discretion, and abide at home in peace. But when I heard thy lamenta-

tions, Iolaus, I came forth, albeit I was not appointed to take the lead in my family. Still in some sense am I fit to do so, for these my brothers are my chiefest care, and I fain would ask, as touching myself, whether some new trouble, added to the former woes, is gnawing at thy heart.

IOLAUS

My daughter, 'tis nothing new that I should praise thee, as I justly may, above all the children of Heracles. Our house seemed to be prospering, when back it fell again into a hopeless state; for the king declares the prophets signify that he must order the sacrifice, not of bull or heifer, but of some tender maid of noble lineage, if we and this city are to exist. Herein is our perplexity; the king refuses either to sacrifice his own or any other's child. Wherefore, though he use not terms express, yet doth he hint, that, unless we find some way out of this perplexity, we must seek some other land, for he this country fain would save.

MACARIA

Are these indeed the terms on which our safety depends?

IOLAUS

Yea, on these; if, that is, we are successful otherwise.

MACARIA

No longer then cower before the hated Argive spear; for I, of my own free will, or ever they bid me, am ready to die and offer myself as a victim. For what excuse have we, if, while this city deems it right to incur a great danger on our behalf, we, though we might save ourselves, fly from death, by foisting our trouble on others? No! indeed, 'twere surely most ridiculous to sit and mourn as suppliants of the gods, and show ourselves but cowards, children as we are of that illustrious sire. Where among the brave is such conduct seen? Better, I suppose, this city should be taken and I (which Heaven forefend!) fall into the hands of the enemy, and then, for all I am my noble father's child, meet an awful doom, and face the Death-god none the less. Shall I wander as an exile from this land? Shall I not feel shame then, when someone says, as say they will, "Why are ye come hither with suppliant boughs, loving your lives too well? Begone from our land! for we will not succour cowards." Nay, if these be slain and I alone be saved, I have no hope in any wise of being happy, though many ere now have in this hope betrayed their friends. For who will care to wed a lonely maid or make me mother of his children? 'Tis better I should die than meet such treatment, little as I merit it. This were fitter treatment for some other, one that is not born to fame as I am. Conduct me to the scene of death, crown me with garlands, and begin the rites, if so it please you; then be victorious o'er the foe, for here

I offer my life freely and without constraint, and for my brothers and myself I undertake to die. For I, by loving not my life too well, have found a treasure very fair, a glorious means to leave it.

LEADER

Ah, what shall I say on hearing the maid's brave words, she that is ready to die for her brothers? Who can speak more noble words or do more noble deeds henceforth for ever?

IOLAUS

Daughter, thou art his own true child, no other man's but Heracles', that godlike soul; proud am I of thy words, though I sorrow for thy lot. Yet will I propose a fairer method: 'tis right to summon hither all the sisters of this maiden, and then let her, on whom the lot shall fall, die for her family; for that thou shouldst die without the lot is not just.

MACARIA

My death shall no chance lot decide; there is no graciousness in that; peace! old friend. But if ye accept and will avail you of my readiness, freely do I offer my life for these, and without constraint.

IOLAUS

Ah, this is even nobler than thy former word; that was matchless, but thou dost now surpass thy bravery and noble speech. I cannot bid, will not forbid thy dying, O my daughter! for by thy death thou dost thy brothers serve.

MACARIA

A cautious bidding thine! Fear not to take a stain of guilt from me, only let me die as one whose death is free. Follow me, old friend, for in thy arms I fain would die; stand by and veil my body with my robe, for I will go even to the dreadful doom of sacrifice, seeing whose daughter I avow myself.

IOLAUS

I cannot stand by and see thee bleed.

MACARIA

At least do thou beg me this boon of the king, that I may breathe out my life in women's arms instead of men's.

DEMOPHON

It shall be so, unhappy maid; for this were shame to me to refuse thee honour due, for many reasons: because thou hast a soul so brave; because 'tis right; and thou hast shown more courage than any of thy sex my eyes have ever seen. Now, if thou hast aught to say to these children or thy aged guide, oh! say the last thou hast to say—then go.

MACARIA

Farewell, old friend, farewell! and prithee teach these children to be like thyself, wise at every point; let them strive no further, for that will suffice them. And seek to save them from death, even as thou art anxious to do; thy children are we, thy care it was that nurtured us. Thou seest how I yield my bridal bloom to die for them. For you, my brothers gathered here, may you be happy! and may every blessing be yours, for the which my blood shall pay the price! Honour this old friend, and her that is within the house, Alcmena, the aged mother of my sire, and these strangers too. And if ever heaven for you devise release from trouble and a return to your home, remember the burial due to her that saved you, a funeral fair as I deserve; for I have not failed, but stood by you, and died to save my race. This shall be my pearl of price instead of children, and for the maiden life I leave, if there be really aught beyond the grave —God grant there may not be! For if, e'en there, we who are to die shall find a life of care, I know not whither one shall turn; for death is held a sovereign cure for every ill.

IOLAUS

Maiden of heroic soul, transcending all thy race, be sure the fame that thou shalt win from us, in life, in death, shall leave the rest of women far behind; farewell to thee! I dare not say harsh words of her to whom thou art devoted, the goddess-daughter of Demeter.

(DEMOPHON *leads* MACARIA *away*.)

Children, I am undone, grief unnerves my limbs; take hold and support me to a seat hard by, when ye have drawn my mantle o'er my face, my sons. For I am grieved at what hath happened, and yet, were it not fulfilled, we could not live; thus were our fate worse, though this is grief enough.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Without the will of heaven none is blest, none curst, I do maintain; nor doth the same house for ever tread the path of bliss; for one kind of fortune follows hard upon another; one man it brings to naught from his high estate, another though of no account it crowns with happiness. To shun what fate decrees, is no wise permitted; none by cunning shall thrust it from him; but he, who vainly would do so, shall have unceasing trouble.

antistrophe

Then fall not prostrate thou, but bear what heaven sends, and set a limit to thy soul's grief; for she, poor maid! in dying for her brothers

and this land, hath won a glorious death, and splendid fame shall be her meed from all mankind; for virtue's path leads through troublous ways. Worthy of her father, worthy of her noble birth is this she does. And if thou dost honour the virtuous dead, I share with thee that sentiment.

(*The* SERVANT OF HYLLUS *enters.*)

SERVANT OF HYLLUS

All hail, ye children! Where is aged Iolaus? where the mother of your sire, absent from their place at this altar?

IOLAUS

Here am I, so far as I can be here at all.

SERVANT

Why dost thou lie there? Why that downcast look?

IOLAUS

There is come a sorrow on my house, whereby I suffer.

SERVANT

Arise, lift up thy head.

IOLAUS

I am old, and all my strength is gone.

SERVANT

But I come with tidings of great joy for thee.

IOLAUS

Who art thou? Where have I met thee? I have no remembrance.

SERVANT

I am a vassal of Hyllus; dost not recognize me now?

IOLAUS

Best of friends, art thou come to save us twain from hurt?

SERVANT

Assuredly; and moreover thou art lucky in the present case.

IOLAUS

Alcmena, mother of a noble son, to thee I call! come forth, hear this welcome news. For long has anguish caused thee inwardly to waste, wondering if those, who now are here, would ever come.

(ALCMENA *enters from the temple in answer to the call.*)

ALCMENA

What means that shout, that echoes throughout the house? Hath there come yet a herald from Argos, O Iolaus, and is he treating thee with violence? Feeble is any strength of mine; yet thus much let me tell thee, stranger, never, whilst I live, shalt thou drag them hence. Shouldst thou succeed, no more let me be thought the mother of that hero. And if thou lay a finger on them, thou wilt struggle to thy shame with two aged foes.

IOLAUS

Courage, aged dame, fear not; not from Argos is a herald come, with hostile messages.

ALCMENA

Why then didst raise a cry, fear's harbinger?

IOLAUS

I called thee to come to me in front of this temple.

ALCMENA

I know not what it means; who is this?

IOLAUS

A messenger who says thy grandson cometh hither.

ALCMENA

All hail to thee for these thy tidings! But why is he not here, where is he? if in this land he hath set foot. What hath happened to keep him from coming hither with thee, to cheer my heart?

SERVANT

He is posting the army he brought with him, and seeing it marshalled.

ALCMENA

Then have I no concern herein.

IOLAUS

Yes, thou hast; though it is my business to inquire.

SERVANT

What then wouldst thou learn of these events?

IOLAUS

About how many allies has he with him?

SERVANT

A numerous force; I cannot otherwise describe the number.

IOLAUS

The leaders of the Athenians know this, I suppose?

SERVANT

They do; already is their left wing set in array.

IOLAUS

Is then the host already armed for battle?

SERVANT

Yea, and already are the victims brought near the ranks.

IOLAUS

About what distance is the Argive host from us?

SERVANT

Near enough for their general to be plainly seen.

IOLAUS

What is he about? marshalling the enemy's line?

SERVANT

So we guessed; we could not hear exactly. But I must go, for I would not that my master should engage the foe without me, if I can help it.

IOLAUS

I also will go with thee; for I like thee am minded, so it seems, to be there and help my friends.

SERVANT

It least of all becomes thee thus to utter words of folly.

IOLAUS

Far less to shrink from sharing with my friends the stubborn fight.

SERVANT

Mere looks can wound no one, if the arm do naught.

IOLAUS

Why, cannot I smite even through their shields?

SERVANT

Smite perhaps, more likely be smitten thyself.

IOLAUS

No foe will dare to meet me face to face.

SERVANT

Friend, the strength, that erst was thine, is thine no more.

IOLAUS

Well, at any rate, I will fight with as many as ever I did.

SERVANT

Small the weight thou canst throw into the balance for thy friends.

IOLAUS

Detain me not, when I have girded myself for action.

SERVANT

The power to act is thine no more, the will maybe is there.

IOLAUS

Stay here I will not, say what else thou wilt.

SERVANT

How shalt thou show thyself before the troops unarmed?

IOLAUS

There be captured arms within this shrine; these will I use, and, if I live, restore; and, if I am slain, the god will not demand them of me back. Go thou within, and from its peg take down a suit of armour and forthwith bring it to me. To linger thus at home is infamous, while some go fight, and others out of cowardice remain behind.

(*The* SERVANT *goes into the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Not yet hath time laid low thy spirit, 'tis young as ever; but thy body's strength is gone. Why toil to no purpose? 'Twill do thee hurt and benefit our city little. At thy age thou shouldst confess thy error and let impossibilities alone. Thou canst in no way get thy vigour back again.

ALCMENA

What means this mad resolve to leave me with my children undefended here?

IOLAUS

Men must fight; and thou must look to them.

ALCMENA

And what if thou art slain? what safety shall I find?

IOLAUS

Thy son's surviving children will care for thee.

ALCMENA

Suppose *they* meet with some reverse? which Heaven forefend!

IOLAUS

These strangers will not give thee up, fear not.

ALCMENA

They are my last and only hope, I have no other.

IOLAUS

Zeus too, I feel sure, cares for thy sufferings.

ALCMENA

Ah! of Zeus will I never speak ill, but himself doth know whether he is just to me.

(*The* SERVANT *enters from the temple, carrying the arms.*)

SERVANT

Lo! here thou seest a full coat of mail; make haste to case thyself therein; for the strife is nigh, and bitterly doth Ares loathe loiterers; but if thou fear the weight of the armour, go now without it, and in the ranks do on this gear; meantime will I carry it.

IOLAUS

Well said! keep the harness ready to my hand, put a spear within my grasp, and support me on the left side, guiding my steps.

SERVANT

Am I to lead this warrior like a child?

IOLAUS

To save the omen, we must go without stumbling.

SERVANT

Would thy power to act were equal to thy zeal!

IOLAUS

Hasten; I shall feel it grievously, if I am too late for the battle.

SERVANT

'Tis thou who art slow, not I, though thou fanciest thou art doing wonders.

IOLAUS

Dost not mark how swift my steps are hasting?

SERVANT

I mark more seeming than reality in thy haste.

IOLAUS

Thou wilt tell a different tale when thou seest me there.

SERVANT

What shall I see thee do? I wish thee all success, at any rate.

IOLAUS

Thou shalt see me smite some foeman through the shield.

SERVANT

Perhaps, if ever we get there. I have my fears of that.

IOLAUS

Ah! would to Heaven that thou, mine arm, e'en as I remember thee in thy lusty youth, when with Heracles thou didst sack Sparta, couldst so champion me to-day! how I would put Eurystheus to flight! since he is too craven to wait the onslaught. For prosperity carries with it this error too, a reputation for bravery; for we think the prosperous man a master of all knowledge.

(IOLAUS *and the* SERVANT *depart.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O earth, and moon that shines by night, and dazzling radiance of the god, that giveth light to man, bear the tidings to me, shout aloud to heaven for joy, and beside our ruler's throne, and in the shrine of grey-eyed Athene. For my fatherland and home will I soon decide the issue of the strife with the gleaming sword, because I have taken suppliants under my protection.

antistrophe 1

'Tis a fearful thing, that a city prosperous as Mycenae is, one famed for martial prowess, should harbour wrath against my land: still, my countrymen, it were a shameful thing in us to yield up suppliant strangers at the bidding of Argos. Zeus is on my side, I am not afraid; Zeus hath a favour unto me, as is my due; never by me shall gods be thought weaker than mortal men.

strophe 2

O dread goddess, thine the soil whereon we stand, thine this city, for thou art its mother, queen, and saviour; wherefore turn some other way the impious king, who leadeth a host from Argos with brandished lance against this land; for, such my worth, I little merit exile from my home.

antistrophe 2

For thy worship [2] is aye performed with many a sacrifice, and never art thou forgotten as each month draweth to its close, when young voices sing and dancers' music is heard abroad, while on our wind-swept hill goes up the cry of joy to the beat of maidens' feet by night.

(*The* SERVANT *enters.*)

SERVANT

Mistress, the message that I bring is very short for thee to hear and fair for me, who stand before thee, to announce. O'er our foes we are victorious, and trophies are being set up, with panoplies upon them, taken from thy enemies.

ALCMENA

Best of friends! this day hath wrought thy liberty by reason of these tidings. But there still remains one anxious thought thou dost not free me from;—a thought of fear;—are those, whose lives I cherish, spared to me?

SERVANT

They are, and high their fame through all the army spreads.

ALCMENA

The old man Iolaus,—is he yet alive?

SERVANT

Aye, that he is, a hero whom the gods delight to honour.

ALCMENA

How so? Did he perform some deed of prowess?

SERVANT

He hath passed from age to youth once more.

ALCMENA

Thy tale is passing strange; but first I would that thou shouldst tell me how our friends won the day.

SERVANT

One speech of mine puts it all clearly before thee. When we had deployed our troops and marshalled them face to face with one another, Hyllus dismounted from his four-horsed chariot and stood midway betwixt the hosts. Then cried he, "Captain, who art come from Argos, why cannot we leave this land alone? No hurt wilt thou do Mycenae, if of one man thou rob her; come! meet me in single combat, and, if thou slay me,

take the children of Heracles away with thee, but, if thou fall, leave me to possess my ancestral honours and my home." The host cried yes! saying the scheme he offered was a fair one, both to rid them of their trouble and satisfy their valour. But that other, feeling no shame before those who heard the challenge or at his own cowardice, quailed, general though he was, to come within reach of the stubborn spear, showing himself an abject coward; yet with such a spirit he came to enslave the children of Heracles. Then did Hyllus withdraw to his own ranks again, and the prophets seeing that no reconciliation would be effected by single combat, began the sacrifice without delay and forthwith let flow from a human [3] throat auspicious streams of blood. And some were mounting chariots, while others couched beneath the shelter of their shields, and the king of the Athenians, as a highborn chieftain should, would exhort his host: "Fellow-citizens, the land, that feeds you and that gave you birth, demands to-day the help of every man." Likewise Eurystheus besought his allies that they should scorn to sully the fame of Argos and Mycenae. Anon the Etrurian trumpet sounded loud and clear, and hand to hand they rushed; then think how loudly clashed their ringing shields, what din arose of cries and groans confused! At first the onset of the Argive spearmen broke our ranks; then they in turn gave ground; next, foot to foot and man to man, they fought their stubborn fray, many falling the while. And either chief cheered on his men, "Sons of Athens! Ye who till the fields of Argos! ward from your land disgrace." Do all we could, and spite of every effort, scarce could we turn the Argive line in flight. When lo! old Iolaus sees Hyllus starting from the ranks, whereon he lifts his hands to him with a prayer to take him up into his chariot. Thereon he seized the reins and went hard after the horses of Eurystheus. From this point onward must I speak from hearsay, though hitherto as one whose own eyes saw. For as he was crossing Pallene's hill, sacred to the goddess Athene, he caught sight of Eurystheus' chariot, and prayed to Hebe and to Zeus, that for one single day he might grow young again and wreak his vengeance on his foes. Now must thou hear a wondrous tale: two stars settled on the horses' yokes and threw the chariot into dark shadow, which —at least so say our wiser folk—were thy son and Hebe; and from that murky gloom appeared that aged man in the form of a youth with strong young arms; then by the rocks of Sciron the hero Iolaus o'ertakes Eurystheus' chariot. And he bound his hands with gyves, and is bringing that chieftain once so prosperous as a trophy hither, whose fortune now doth preach a lesson, clear as day, to all the sons of men, that none should envy him, who seems to thrive, until they see his death; for fortune's moods last but a day.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O Zeus, who puttest my foes to flight, now may I behold the day that frees me from cruel fear!

ALCMENA

At last, O Zeus, hast thou turned a favouring eye on my affliction; yet do I thank thee for what has happened. And though ere this I did not believe my son was gathered to the gods, now am I convinced thereof. My children, now at last from toil shall ye be free, free from him, whom hideous death awaits, Eurystheus; now shall ye behold your father's city, and set foot in the land of your inheritance, and sacrifice to those ancestral gods, from whom ye have been debarred and forced to lead in strangers' lands a life of wretched vagrancy. But tell me, what sage purpose Iolaus nursed in his heart, that he spared the life of Eurystheus, for to my mind this is no wisdom, to catch a foe and wreak no vengeance on him.

SERVANT

'Twas his regard for thee, that thou might'st see him subject to thy hand, and triumph o'er him. Rest assured, 'twas no willing prisoner he made, but by strong constraint he bound him, for Eurystheus was loth indeed to come alive into thy presence and pay his penalty. Farewell, my aged mistress; I pray thee remember thy first promise when I was beginning my story; set me free; for, at such a time as this, sincerity becometh noble lips.

(*The* SERVANT *departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Sweet is the dance to me, whenso the clear-toned flute and lovely Aphrodite shed grace upon the feast; and a joyful thing too it is, I trow, to witness the good luck of friends, who till then ne'er dreamt of it. For numerous is the offspring of Fate, that bringeth all to pass, and of Time, the son of Cronus.

antistrophe 1

Thine is the path of justice, O my city; this must no man wrest from thee, thy reverence for the gods, and, whoso denieth it of thee, draws nigh to frenzy's goal, with these plain proofs in view. Yea, for the god proclaims it clearly, by cutting short the bad man's pride in every case.

strophe 2

In heaven, mother, lives thy son, passed from earth away; that he went down to Hades' halls, his body burnt by the fire's fierce flame,

is past belief; in golden halls reclined he has to wife Hebe, lovely nymph. Thou, O Hymen, hast honoured them, children both of Zeus.

antistrophe 2

Things for the most part form a single chain; for men say Athene used to champion their father, and now the citizens of that goddess have saved his children, and checked the insolence of him whose heart preferred violence to justice. God save me from such arrogance, such greed of soul!

(*A* MESSENGER *enters. He is followed by guards who bring in* EURYSTHEUS *bound.*)

MESSENGER

Mistress, though thine eyes see him, yet will I announce we have brought Eurystheus hither for thy pleasure, an unexpected sight, for him no less a chance he ne'er foresaw; for little he thought of ever falling into thy hands, what time he marched from Mycenae with his toil-worn warriors, to sack Athens, thinking himself far above fortune. But a power divine hath reversed our destinies, changing their position. Now Hyllus and brave Iolaus I left raising an image to Zeus, who routs the foe, for their triumphant victory, whilst they bid me bring this prisoner to thee, wishing to gladden thy heart; for 'tis the sweetest sight to see a foe fall on evil days after prosperity.

ALCMENA

Art come, thou hateful wretch? Hath Justice caught thee then at last? First, turn thy head this way to me, and endure to look thy enemies in the face, for thou art no more the ruler, but the slave. Art thou the man —for this I fain would learn—who didst presume to heap thy insults on my son, who now is where he is, thou miscreant? What outrage didst thou abstain from putting upon him? Thou that didst make him go down alive even to Hades, and wouldst send him with an order to slay hydras and lions? Thy other evil schemes I mention not, for to tell them were a tedious task for me. Nor did it content thee to venture thus far only; no! but from all Hellas wouldst thou drive me and my children, heaven's suppliants though we were, grey-heads some of us, and some still tender babes. But here hast thou found men and a free city, that feared not thee. Die in torment must thou, and e'en so wilt thou gain in every way, for one death is not thy due, after all the sorrow thou hast caused.

MESSENGER

Thou mayst not slay him.

ALCMENA

Then have we taken him captive in vain. But say, what law forbids his death?

MESSENGER

It is not the will of the rulers of this land.

ALCMENA

Why, what is this? Do they not approve of slaying enemies?

MESSENGER

Not such as they have taken alive in battle.

ALCMENA

Did Hyllus uphold this decision?

MESSENGER

He, I suppose, ought to have disobeyed the law of the land.

ALCMENA

The prisoner's life ought not to have been spared a moment.

MESSENGER

It was then that he was wronged, by not being slain at first.

ALCMENA

Why, then, he is still in time to pay his penalty.

MESSENGER

There is no one who will slay him now.

ALCMENA

I will; and yet I count myself someone.

MESSENGER

Well, thou wilt incur great blame, if thou do this deed.

ALCMENA

I love this city well; that cannot be gainsaid. But since this man hath fallen into my power, no mortal hand shall wrest him from me. Wherefore let who will, call me the woman bold, with thoughts too high for her sex; yet shall this deed be brought to pass by me.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Lady, full well I understand thou hast a dire quarrel with this man, and 'tis pardonable.

EURYSTHEUS

Woman, be sure I will not flatter thee nor say aught to save my life, that can give any occasion for a charge of cowardice. It was not of my own free will I took this quarrel up; I am aware that I was born thy cousin, and kinsman to Heracles, thy son; but whether I would or no, Hera, by her power divine, caused me to be afflicted thus. Still, when I undertook to be his foe, and when I knew I had to enter on this struggle, I set myself to devise trouble in plenty, and oft from time to time my midnight communing bore fruit, scheming how to push aside and slay my foes, and for the future divorce myself from fear; for I knew that son of thine was no mere cipher, but a man indeed; yea, for, though he was my foe, I will speak well of him, because he was a man of worth. Now, after he was taken hence, was I not forced, by reason of these children's hatred, and because I was conscious of an hereditary feud, to leave no stone unturned by slaying, banishing, and plotting against them? So long as I did so, my safety was assured. Suppose thyself hadst had my lot, wouldst not thou have set to harassing the lion's angry whelps, instead of letting them dwell at Argos undisturbed? Thou wilt not persuade us otherwise. Now therefore, since they did not slay me then, when I was prepared to die, by the laws of Hellas my death becomes a curse on him who slays me now. The city wisely let me go, in that she regarded the gods more than her hatred of me. Thou hast had my answer to thy words; henceforth must I be called avenging spirit and noble hero too. 'Tis even thus with me; to die have I no wish, but, if I leave my life, I shall in no way be grieved.

LEADER

Alcmena, fain I would advise thee somewhat; let this man go, for 'tis the city's will.

ALCMENA

Suppose he die, and yet I obey the city?

LEADER

That would be best of all; but how can this be?

ALCMENA

I will teach thee easily. I will slay him and then give up his corpse to those of his friends who come for it, for, as regards his body, I will not disobey the state; but by his death shall he pay me the penalty.

EURYSTHEUS

Slay me, I do not ask thee for mercy; yet since this city let me go and shrunk from slaying me, I will reward it with an old oracle of Loxias, which in time will benefit them more than doth appear. Burv my body

after death in its destined grave in front of the shrine of the virgin goddess at Pallene. And I will be thy friend and guardian of thy city for ever, where I lie buried in a foreign soil, but a bitter foe to these children's descendants, whensoe'er [4] with gathered host they come against this land, traitors to your kindness now; such are the strangers ye have championed. Why then came I hither, if I knew all this, instead of regarding the god's oracle? Because I thought, that Hera was mightier far than any oracle, and would not betray me. Waste no drink-offering on my tomb, nor spill the victim's blood; for I will requite them for my treatment here with a journey they shall rue; and ye shall have double gain from me, for I will help you and harm them by my death.

ALCMENA

Why, why delay to kill this man, after hearing this, since this is needed to secure the safety of your city and your children? Himself points out the safest road. Though the man is now our foe, yet after death is he our gain. Away with him, ye servants, and cast him [5] to the dogs when ye have slain him. Think not thou shalt live to cast me forth from my native land again.

(*The guards lead out* EURYSTHEUS.)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

I agree. Lead on, servants. Our conduct shall bring no stain of guilt upon our rulers.

NOTES FOR THE HERACLEIDAE

THE translation of Coleridge has been slightly modified in the following lines: 6, 128, 167, 225, 236, 296, 419, 507, 626, 632, 634, 666, 724, 920.

1. This refers to the girdle of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, which Heracles had to procure as one of his labours for Eurystheus.

2. The Chorus is alluding to the festival of the Panathenaea.

3. If the text which Coleridge here has translated is correct, this is possibly a reference to the sacrifice of Macaria.

4. Coleridge points out in a note that Eurystheus is referring to invasions by the Peloponnesians, descendants of the Heracleidae. It might be added that this line is typical of the allusions to contemporary events which are found in the play.

5. This apparent breach of her promise is usually explained by the theory that the play in its present form is incomplete.

VII
THE SUPPLIANTS

Characters in the Play

Aethra, *mother of* Theseus
Chorus of Argive Mothers
Theseus, *King of Athens*
Adrastus, *King of Argos*
Herald, *of Creon, King of Thebes*
Messenger
Evadne, *wife of Capaneus*
Iphis, *father of* Evadne
Children *of the slain chieftains*
Athena
Guards, attendants, soldiers

INTRODUCTION

ARGUING from certain fairly apparent allusions in the play to contemporary events of the Peloponnesian War, scholars have generally concluded that *The Suppliants* was first acted about 420 B.C. Like *The Heracleidae,* the central purpose of the piece seems to be a eulogy of Athens. Euripides here again stresses the glory of the Athenian democratic institutions, her religious piety, and her traditional rôle as a defender of the down-trodden and oppressed. The subject-matter of the play derives from the Theban saga, but presents an aspect of it which is not met elsewhere in the extant Greek tragedy. The dramatic action occurs after the Thebans under Eteocles have successfully repulsed the attack upon their city by the Argives under the leadership of Polyneices and Adrastus. The play assumes a knowledge of the unhappy story of Oedipus and his sons, but it centres primarily upon the defeated Argives and their sorrow for their fallen champions. The suppliants, from whom the play takes its name, are the mothers of these slain champions. The victorious Thebans have refused to allow them to bury their dead, and they have come to Athens in order to enlist the support of King Theseus. The play records how Theseus gave his support, recovered the bodies by defeating the Theban army, and finally made it possible for the due rites of burial to be performed.

As in *The Heracleidae,* the emphasis upon the praise of Athens has caused the play to suffer in respect to its dramatic structure and portrayal of character. No one of the characters seems to be adequately drawn, while the lack of integration between the several scenes gives an "episodic" impression which detracts materially from the effect of the whole. Some of the individual scenes in themselves are not without merit. For example, in the argument between Theseus and the Herald of Creon, there is a most able defence of the political structure of democracy, yet from the point of view of the whole play, one cannot but feel that here is the gratuitous introduction of an essentially extraneous element. Similarly, the scene wherein Evadne leaps upon the pyre of her husband, though somewhat melodramatic, carries with it no inconsiderable emotional power, yet one can scarcely discover an adequate reason for its

presence in the play. Even the final appearance of Athena as a *deus ex machina* does not seem to be demanded by the situation. These unfavorable criticisms are partially offset by the fact that there are certain scenes, such as the spectacular funeral procession of the dead heroes, which do tend to focus the play around the glory of Athens and her devotion to the gods. Such force as the play possesses seems to spring from Euripides' insistence throughout that the will of Heaven is of first importance for the life of man.

THE SUPPLIANTS

(SCENE:—*Before the temple of Demeter at Eleusis. On the steps of the great altar is seated* AETHRA. *Around her, in the garb of suppliants, is the* CHORUS OF ARGIVE MOTHERS. ADRASTUS *lies on the ground before the altar, crushed in abject grief. The* CHILDREN *of the slain chieftains stand nearby. Around the altar are the attendants of the goddess.*)

AETHRA

O DEMETER, guardian of this Eleusinian land, and ye servants of the goddess who attend her fane, grant happiness to me and my son Theseus, to the city of Athens and the country of Pittheus, wherein my father reared me, Aethra, in a happy home, and gave me in marriage to Aegeus, Pandion's son, according to the oracle of Loxias. This prayer I make, when I behold these aged dames, who, leaving their homes in Argos, now throw themselves with suppliant branches at my knees in their awful trouble; for around the gates of Cadmus have they lost their seven noble sons, whom on a day Adrastus, king of Argos, led thither, eager to secure for exiled Polyneices, his son-in-law, a share in the heritage of Oedipus; so now their mothers would bury in the grave the dead, whom the spear hath slain, but the victors prevent them and will not allow them to take up the corpses, spurning Heaven's laws. Here lies Adrastus on the ground with streaming eye, sharing with them the burden of their prayer to me, and bemoaning the havoc of the sword and the sorry fate of the warriors whom he led from their homes. And he doth urge me use entreaty, to persuade my son to take up the dead and help to bury them, either by winning words or force of arms, laying on my son and on Athens this task alone. Now it chanced, that I had left my house and come to offer sacrifice on behalf of the earth's crop at this shrine, where first the fruitful corn showed its bristling shocks above the soil. And here at the holy altars of the twain goddesses, Demeter and her daughter, I wait, holding these sprays of foliage, a bond that bindeth not, in compassion for these childless mothers, hoary with age, and from reverence for the sacred fillets. To call Theseus hither is my herald to the city gone, that he may rid the land of that which grieveth them, or loose these my suppliant bonds, with

pious observance of the gods' will; for such as are discreet amongst women should in all cases invoke the aid of men.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe 1

At thy knees I fall, aged dame, and my old lips beseech thee; arise, rescue from the slain my children's bodies, whose limbs, by death relaxed, are left a prey to savage mountain beasts,

antistrophe 1

Beholding the bitter tears which spring to my eyes and my old wrinkled skin torn by my hands; for what can I do else? who never laid out my children dead within my halls, nor now behold their tombs heaped up with earth.

strophe 2

Thou too, honoured lady, once a son didst bear, crowning thy lord's marriage with fond joy; then share, O share with me thy mother's feelings, in such measure as my sad heart grieves for my own dead sons; and persuade thy son, whose aid we implore, to go unto the river Ismenus, there to place within my hapless arms the bodies of my children, slain in their prime and left without a tomb.

antistrophe 2

Though not as piety enjoins, yet from sheer necessity I have come to the fire-crowned altars of the gods, falling on my knees with instant supplication, for my cause is just, and 'tis in thy power, blest as thou art in thy children, to remove from me my woe; so in my sore distress I do beseech thee of my misery place in my hands my son's dead body, that I may throw my arms about his hapless limbs.

(*The attendants of the goddess take up the lament.*)

strophe 3

Behold a rivalry in sorrow! woe takes up the tale of woe; hark! thy servants beat their breasts. Come ye who join the mourners' wail, come, O sympathetic band, to join the dance, which Hades honours; let the pearly nail be stained red, as it rends your cheeks, let your skin be streaked with gore; for honours rendered to the dead are a credit to the living.

antistrophe 3

Sorrow's charm doth drive me wild, insatiate, painful, endless, even as the trickling stream that gushes from some steep rock's face;

for 'tis woman's way to fall a-weeping o'er the cruel calamity of children dead. Ah me! would I could die and forget my anguish!

(THESEUS *and his retinue enter.*)

THESEUS

What is this lamentation that I hear, this beating of the breast, these dirges for the dead, with cries that echo from this shrine? How fluttering fear disquiets me, lest haply my mother have gotten some mischance, in quest of whom I come, for she hath been long absent from home. Ha! what now? A strange sight challenges my speech; I see my aged mother sitting at the altar and stranger dames are with her, who in various note proclaim their woe; from aged eyes the piteous tear is starting to the ground, their hair is shorn, their robes are not the robes of joy. What means it, mother? 'Tis thine to make it plain to me, mine to listen; yea, for I expect some tidings strange.

AETHRA

My son, these are the mothers of those chieftains seven, who fell around the gates of Cadmus' town. With suppliant boughs they keep me prisoner, as thou seest, in their midst.

THESEUS

And who is yonder man, that moaneth piteously in the gateway?

AETHRA

Adrastus, they inform me, king of Argos.

THESEUS

Are those his children, those boys who stand round him?

AETHRA

Not his, but the sons of the fallen slain.

THESEUS

Why are they come to us, with suppliant hand outstretched?

AETHRA

I know; but 'tis for them to tell their story, my son.

THESEUS

To thee, in thy mantle muffled, I address my inquiries; unveil thy head, let lamentation be, and speak; for naught can be achieved save through the utterance of thy tongue.

ADRASTUS (*rising*)

Victorious prince of the Athenian realm, Theseus, to thee and to thy city I, a suppliant, come.

THESEUS

What seekest thou? What need is thine?

ADRASTUS

Dost know how I did lead an expedition to its ruin?

THESEUS

Assuredly; thou didst not pass through Hellas, all in silence.

ADRASTUS

There I lost the pick of Argos' sons.

THESEUS

These are the results of that unhappy war.

ADRASTUS

I went and craved their bodies from Thebes.

THESEUS

Didst thou rely on heralds, Hermes' servants, in order to bury them?

ADRASTUS

I did; and even then their slayers said me nay.

THESEUS

Why, what say they to thy just request?

ADRASTUS

Say! Success makes them forget how to bear their fortune.

THESEUS

Art come to me then for counsel? or wherefore?

ADRASTUS

With the wish that thou, O Theseus, shouldst recover the sons of the Argives.

THESEUS

Where is your Argos now? were its vauntings all in vain?

ADRASTUS

Defeat and ruin are our lot. To thee for aid we come.

THESEUS
Is this thy own private resolve, or the wish of all the city?

ADRASTUS
The sons of Danaus, one and all, implore thee to bury the dead.

THESEUS
Why didst lead thy seven armies against Thebes?

ADRASTUS
To confer that favour on the husbands of my daughters twain.

THESEUS
To which of the Argives didst thou give thy daughters in marriage?

ADRASTUS
I made no match for them with kinsmen of my family.

THESEUS
What! didst give Argive maids to foreign lords?

ADRASTUS
Yea, to Tydeus, and to Polyneices, who was Theban-born.

THESEUS
What induced thee to select this alliance?

ADRASTUS
Dark riddles of Phoebus stole away my judgment.

THESEUS
What said Apollo to determine the maidens' marriage?

ADRASTUS
That I should give my daughters twain to a wild boar and a lion.

THESEUS
How dost thou explain the message of the god?

ADRASTUS
One night came to my door two exiles.

THESEUS
The name of each declare; thou art speaking of both together.

ADRASTUS
They fought together, Tydeus with Polyneices.

THESEUS

Didst thou give thy daughters to them as to wild beasts?

ADRASTUS

Yea, for, as they fought, I likened them to those monsters twain.

THESEUS

Why had they left the borders of their native land and come to thee?

ADRASTUS

Tydeus was exiled for the murder of a kinsman.

THESEUS

Wherefore had the son of Oedipus left Thebes?

ADRASTUS

By reason of his father's curse, not to spill his brother's blood.

THESEUS

Wise no doubt that voluntary exile.

ADRASTUS

But those who stayed at home were for injuring the absent.

THESEUS

What! did brother rob brother of his inheritance?

ADRASTUS

To avenge this I set out; hence my ruin.

THESEUS

Didst consult seers, and gaze into the flame of burnt-offerings?

ADRASTUS

Ah me! thou pressest on the very point wherein I most did fail.

THESEUS

It seems thy going was not favoured by heaven.

ADRASTUS

Worse; I went in spite even of Amphiaraus.

THESEUS

And so heaven lightly turned its face from thee.

ADRASTUS

I was carried away by the clamour of younger men.

THESEUS

Thou didst favour courage instead of discretion.

ADRASTUS

True; and many a general owes defeat to that. O king of Athens, bravest of the sons of Hellas, I blush to throw myself upon the ground and clasp thy knees, I a grey-haired king, blest in days gone by; yet needs must I yield to my misfortunes. I pray thee save the dead; have pity on my sorrows and on these, the mothers of the slain, whom hoary eld finds reft of their sons; yet they endured to journey hither and tread a foreign soil with aged tottering steps, bearing no embassy to Demeter's mysteries; only seeking burial for their dead, which lot should have been theirs, e'en burial by the hands of sons still in their prime. And 'tis wise in the rich to see the poor man's poverty, and in the poor man to turn ambitious eyes toward the rich, that so he may himself indulge a longing for possessions; and they, whom fortune frowns not on, should gaze on misery's presentment; likewise, who maketh songs should take a pleasure in their making; for if it be not so with him, he will in no wise avail to gladden others, if himself have sorrow in his home; nay, 'tis not even right to expect it. Mayhap thou'lt say, "Why pass the land of Pelops o'er, and lay this toil on Athens?" This am I bound to declare. Sparta is cruel, her customs variable; the other states are small and weak. Thy city alone would be able to undertake this labour; for it turns an eye on suffering, and hath in thee a young and gallant king, for want whereof to lead their hosts states ere now have often perished.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

I too, Theseus, urge the same plea to thee; have pity on my hard fate.

THESEUS [1]

Full oft have I argued out this subject with others. For there are who say, there is more bad than good in human nature, to the which I hold a contrary view, that good o'er bad predominates in man, for if it were not so, we should not exist. He hath my praise, whoe'er of gods brought us to live by rule from chaos and from brutishness, first by implanting reason, and next by giving us a tongue to declare our thoughts, so as to know the meaning of what is said, bestowing fruitful crops, and drops of rain from heaven to make them grow, wherewith to nourish earth's fruits and to water her lap; and more than this, protection from the wintry storm, and means to ward from us the sun-god's scorching heat; the art of sailing o'er the sea, so that we might exchange with one another whatso our countries lack. And where sight fails us and our knowledge is not sure, the seer foretells by gazing on the flame, by reading signs in folds of entrails, or by divination from the flight of birds. Are we not then too

proud, when heaven hath made such preparation for our life, not to be content therewith? But our presumption seeks to lord it over heaven, and in the pride of our hearts we think we are wiser than the gods. Methinks thou art even of this number, a son of folly, seeing that thou, though obedient to Apollo's oracle in giving thy daughters to strangers, as if gods really existed, yet hast hurt thy house by mingling the stream of its pure line with muddy waters; no! never should the wise man have joined the stock of just and unjust in one, but should have gotten prosperous friends for his family. For the deity, confusing their destinies, doth oft destroy by the sinner's fate him who never sinned nor committed injustice. Thou didst lead all Argos forth to battle, though seers proclaimed the will of heaven, and then in scorn of them and in violent disregard of the gods hast ruined thy city, led away by younger men, such as court distinction, and add war to war unrighteously, destroying their fellow-citizens; one aspires to lead an army; another fain would seize the reins of power and work his wanton will; a third is bent on gain, careless of any ill the people thereby suffer. For there are three ranks of citizens; the rich, a useless set, that ever crave for more; the poor and destitute, fearful folk, that cherish envy more than is right, and shoot out grievous stings against the men who have aught, beguiled as they are by the eloquence of vicious leaders; while the class that is midmost of the three preserveth cities, observing such order as the state ordains. Shall I then become thy ally? What fair pretext should I urge before my countrymen? Depart in peace! For why shouldst thou, having been ill-advised thyself, seek to drag our fortune down?

LEADER

He erred; but with the young men rests this error, while he may well be pardoned.

ADRASTUS

I did not choose thee, king, to judge my affliction, but came to thee to cure it; no! nor if in aught my fortunes prove me wrong, came I to thee to punish or correct them, but to seek thy help. But if thou wilt not, I must be content with thy decision; for how can I help it? Come, aged dames, away! Yet leave behind you here the woven leaves of pale green foliage, calling to witness heaven and earth, Demeter, that fire-bearing goddess, and the sun-god's light, that our prayers to heaven availed us naught.

CHORUS (*singing*) [2]

. . . who was Pelops' son, and we are of the land of Pelops and share with thee the blood of ancestors. What art thou doing? wilt thou betray these suppliant symbols, and banish from thy land these

aged women without the boon they should obtain? Do not so; e'en the wild beast finds a refuge in the rock, the slave in the altars of the gods, and a state when tempest-tossed cowers to its neighbour's shelter; for naught in this life of man is blest unto its end.

Rise, hapless one, from the sacred floor of Persephone; rise, clasp him by the knees and implore him, "O recover the bodies of our dead sons, the children that I lost—ah, woe is me!—beneath the walls of Cadmus' town." Ah me! ah me! Take me by the hand, poor aged sufferer that I am, support and guide and raise me up. By thy beard, kind friend, glory of Hellas, I do beseech thee, as I clasp thy knees and hands in my misery; O pity me as I entreat for my sons with my tale of wretched woe, like some beggar; nor let my sons lie there unburied in the land of Cadmus, glad prey for beasts, whilst thou art in thy prime, I implore thee. See the teardrop tremble in my eye, as thus I throw me at thy knees to win my children burial.

THESEUS

Mother mine, why weepest thou, drawing o'er thine eyes thy veil? Is it because thou didst hear their piteous lamentations? To my own heart it goes. Raise thy silvered head, weep not where thou sittest at the holy altar of Demeter.

AETHRA

Ah woe!

THESEUS

'Tis not for thee their sorrows to lament.

AETHRA

Ye hapless dames!

THESEUS

Thou art not of their company.

AETHRA

May I a scheme declare, my son, that shall add to thy glory and the state's?

THESEUS

Yea, for oft even from women's lips issue wise counsels.

AETHRA

Yet the word, that lurks within my heart, makes me hesitate.

THESEUS

Shame! to hide from friends good counsel.

AETHRA

Nay then, I will not hold my peace to blame myself hereafter for having now kept silence to my shame, nor will I forego my honourable proposal, from the common fear that it is useless for women to give good advice. First, my son, I exhort thee give good heed to heaven's will, lest from slighting it thou suffer shipwreck; for in this one single point thou failest, though well-advised in all else. Further, I would have patiently endured, had it not been my duty to venture somewhat for injured folk; and this, my son, it is that brings thee now thy honour, and causes me no fear to urge that thou shouldst use thy power to make men of violence, who prevent the dead from receiving their meed of burial and funeral rites, perform this bounden duty, and check those who would confound the customs of all Hellas; for this it is that holds men's states together,—strict observance of the laws. And some, no doubt, will say, 'twas cowardice made thee stand aloof in terror, when thou mightest have won for thy city a crown of glory, and, though thou didst encounter a savage swine,[3] labouring for a sorry task, yet when the time came for thee to face the helmet and pointed spear, and do thy best, thou wert found to be a coward. Nay! do not so if thou be son of mine. Dost see how fiercely thy country looks on its revilers when they mock her for want of counsel? Yea, for in her toils she groweth greater. But states, whose policy is dark and cautious, have their sight darkened by their carefulness. My son, wilt thou not go succour the dead and these poor women in their need? I have no fears for thee, starting as thou dost with right upon thy side; and although I see the prosperity of Cadmus' folk, still am I confident they will throw a different die; for the deity reverses all things again.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah! best of friends, right well hast thou pleaded for me and for Adrastus, and hence my joy is doubled.

THESEUS

Mother, the words that I have spoken are his fair deserts, and I have declared my opinion of the counsels that ruined him; yet do I perceive the truth of thy warning to me, that it ill suits my character to shun dangers. For by a long and glorious career have I displayed this my habit among Hellenes, of ever punishing the wicked. Wherefore I cannot refuse toil. For what will spiteful tongues say of me, when thou, my mother, who more than all others fearest for my safety, bidst me undertake this enterprise? Yea, I will go about this business and rescue the dead by words persuasive; or, failing that, the spear forthwith shall decide this issue, nor will heaven grudge me this. But I require the whole city's sanction also, which my mere wish will ensure; still by communicating the proposal to them I shall find the people better disposed. For them I made supreme,

when I set this city free, by giving all an equal vote. So I will take Adrastus as a text for what I have to say and go to their assembly, and when I have won them to these views, I will return hither, after collecting a picked band of young Athenians; and then remaining under arms I will send a message to Creon, begging the bodies of the dead. But do ye, aged ladies, remove from my mother your holy wreaths, that I may take her by the hand and conduct her to the house of Aegeus; for a wretched son is he who rewards not his parents by service; for, when he hath conferred on them the best he hath, he in his turn from his own sons receives all such service as he gave to them.

(AETHRA *leaves the altar and departs.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O Argos, home of steeds, my native land! ye have heard with your ears these words, the king's pious will toward the gods in the sight of great Pelasgia and throughout Argos.

antistrophe 1

May he reach the goal! yea, and triumph o'er my sorrows, rescuing the gory corpse, the mother's idol and making the land of Inachus his friend by helping her.

strophe 2

For pious toil is a fair ornament to cities, and carries with it a grace that never wastes away. What will the city decide, I wonder? Will it conclude a friendly truce with me, and shall we obtain burial for our sons?

antistrophe 2

Help, O help, city of Pallas, the mother's cause, that so they may not pollute the laws of all mankind. Thou, I know, dost reverence right, and to injustice dealest out defeat, a protection at all times to the afflicted.

(THESEUS *addresses one of his own heralds. As he speaks, the* HERALD *from King Creon of Thebes enters.*)

THESEUS

Forasmuch as with this thy art thou hast ever served the state and me by carrying my proclamations far and wide, so now cross Asopus and the waters of Ismenus, and declare this message to the haughty king of the Cadmeans: "Theseus, thy neighbour, one who well may win the boon he craves, begs as a favour thy permission to bury the dead, winning to thy-

self thereby the love of all the Erechtheidae." And if they will acquiesce, come back again, but if they hearken not, thy second message runneth thus, they may expect my warrior host; for at the sacred fount of Callichorus my army camps in readiness and is being reviewed. Moreover, the city gladly of its own accord undertook this enterprise, when it perceived my wish. Ha! who comes hither to interrupt my speech? A Theban herald, so it seems, though I am not sure thereof. Stay; haply he may save thee thy trouble. For by his coming he meets my purpose half-way.

THEBAN HERALD

Who is the despot of this land? To whom must I announce the message of Creon, who rules o'er the land of Cadmus, since Eteocles was slain by the hand of his brother Polyneices, at the sevenfold gates of Thebes?

THESEUS

Sir stranger, thou hast made a false beginning to thy speech, in seeking here a despot. For this city is not ruled by one man, but is free. The people rule in succession year by year, allowing no preference to wealth, but the poor man shares equally with the rich.

THEBAN HERALD

Thou givest me here an advantage, as it might be in a game of draughts; for the city, whence I come, is ruled by one man only, not by the mob; none there puffs up the citizens with specious words, and for his own advantage twists them this way or that,—one moment dear to them and lavish of his favours, the next a bane to all; and yet by fresh calumnies of others he hides his former failures and escapes punishment. Besides, how shall the people, if it cannot form true judgments, be able rightly to direct the state? Nay, 'tis time, not haste, that affords a better understanding. A poor hind, granted he be not all unschooled, would still be unable from his toil to give his mind to politics. Verily the better sort count it no healthy sign when the worthless man obtains a reputation by beguiling with words the populace, though aforetime he was naught.

THESEUS

This herald is a clever fellow, a dabbler in the art of talk. But since thou hast thus entered the lists with me, listen awhile, for 'twas thou didst challenge a discussion. Naught is more hostile to a city than a despot; [4] where he is, there are first no laws common to all, but one man is tyrant, in whose keeping and in his alone the law resides, and in that case equality is at an end. But when the laws are written down, rich and poor alike have equal justice, and it is open to the weaker to use the same language to the prosperous when he is reviled by him, and the weaker prevails over the stronger if he have justice on his side. Freedom's mark

is also seen in this: "Who hath wholesome counsel to declare unto the state?" And he who chooses to do so gains renown, while he, who hath no wish, remains silent. What greater equality can there be in a city? Again, where the people are absolute rulers of the land, they rejoice in having a reserve of youthful citizens, while a king counts this a hostile element, and strives to slay the leading men, all such as he deems discreet, for he feareth for his power. How then can a city remain stable, where one cuts short all enterprise and mows down the young like meadow-flowers in spring-time? What boots it to acquire wealth and livelihood for children, merely to add to the tyrant's substance by one's toil? Why train up virgin daughters virtuously in our homes to gratify a tyrant's whim, whenso he will, and cause tears to those who rear them? May my life end if ever my children are to be wedded by violence! This bolt I launch in answer to thy words. Now say, why art thou come? what needest thou of this land? Had not thy city sent thee, to thy cost hadst thou come with thy outrageous utterances; for it is the herald's duty to tell the message he is bidden and hie him back in haste. Henceforth let Creon send to my city some other messenger less talkative than thee.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Look you! how insolent the villains are, when Fortune is kind to them, just as if it would be well with them for ever.

THEBAN HERALD

Now will I speak. On these disputed points hold thou this view, but I the contrary. So I and all the people of Cadmus forbid thee to admit Adrastus to this land, but if he is here, drive him forth in disregard of the holy suppliant bough he bears, ere sinks yon blazing sun, and attempt not violently to take up the dead, seeing thou hast naught to do with the city of Argos. And if thou wilt hearken to me, thou shalt bring thy barque of state into port unharmed by the billows; but if not, fierce shall the surge of battle be, that we and our allies shall raise. Take good thought, nor, angered at my words, because forsooth thou rulest thy city with freedom, return a vaunting answer from thy feebler means. Hope is man's curse; many a state hath it involved in strife, by leading them into excessive rage. For whenso the city has to vote on the question of war, no man ever takes his own death into account, but shifts this misfortune on to his neighbour; but if death had been before their eyes when they were giving their votes, Hellas would ne'er have rushed to her doom in mad desire for battle. And yet each man amongst us knows which of the two to prefer, the good or ill, and how much better peace is for mankind than war,—peace, the Muses' chiefest friend, the foe of sorrow, whose joy is in glad throngs of children, and its delight in prosperity. These are the blessings

we cast away and wickedly embark on war, man enslaving his weaker brother, and cities following suit. Now thou art helping our foes even after death, trying to rescue and bury those whom their own acts of insolence have ruined. Verily then it would seem Capaneus was unjustly blasted by the thunderbolt and charred upon the ladder he had raised against our gates, swearing he would sack our town, whether the god would or no; nor should the yawning earth have snatched away the seer,[5] opening wide her mouth to take his chariot and its horses in, nor should the other chieftains be stretched at our gates, their skeletons to atoms crushed 'neath boulders. Either boast thy wit transcendeth that of Zeus, or else allow that gods are right to slay the ungodly. The wise should love their children first, next their parents and country, whose fortunes it behoves them to increase rather than break down. Rashness in a leader, as in a pilot, causeth shipwreck; who knoweth when to be quiet is a wise man. Yea and this too is bravery, even forethought.

LEADER

The punishment Zeus hath inflicted was surely enough; there was no need to heap this wanton insult on us.

ADRASTUS

Abandoned wretch!

THESEUS

Peace, Adrastus! say no more; set not thy words before mine, for 'tis not to thee this fellow is come with his message, but to me, and I must answer him. Thy first assertion will I answer first: I am not aware that Creon is my lord and master, or that his power outweigheth mine, that so he should compel Athens to act on this wise; nay! for then would the tide of time have to flow backward, if we are to be ordered, as he thinks. 'Tis not I who choose this war, seeing that I did not even join these warriors to go unto the land of Cadmus; but still I claim to bury the fallen dead, not injuring any state nor yet introducing murderous strife, but preserving the law of all Hellas. What is not well in this? If ye suffered aught from the Argives—lo! they are dead; ye took a splendid vengeance on your foes and covered them with shame, and now your right is at an end. Let the dead now be buried in the earth, and each element return to the place from whence it came to the body, the breath to the air, the body to the ground; for in no wise did we get it for our own, but to live our life in, and after that its mother earth must take it back again. Dost think 'tis Argos thou art injuring in refusing burial to the dead? Nay! all Hellas shares herein, if a man rob the dead of their due and keep them from the tomb; for, if this law be enacted, it will strike dismay into the stoutest hearts. And art thou come to cast dire threats at me, while thy

own folk are afraid of giving burial to the dead? What is your fear? Think you they will undermine your land in their graves, or that they will beget children in the womb of earth, from whom shall rise an avenger? A silly waste of words, in truth it was, to show your fear of paltry goundless terrors. Go, triflers, learn the lesson of human misery; our life is made up of struggles; some men there be that find their fortune soon, others have to wait, while some at once are blest. Fortune lives a dainty life; to her the wretched pays his court and homage to win her smile; her likewise doth the prosperous man extol, for fear the favouring gale may leave him. These lessons should we take to heart, to bear with moderation, free from wrath, our wrongs, and do naught to hurt a whole city. What then? Let us, who will the pious deed perform, bury the corpses of the slain. Else is the issue clear; I will go and bury them by force. For never shall it be proclaimed through Hellas that heaven's ancient law was set at naught, when it devolved on me and the city of Pandion.

LEADER

Be of good cheer; for if thou preserve the light of justice, thou shalt escape many a charge that men might urge.

THEBAN HERALD

Wilt thou that I sum up in brief all thou wouldst say?

THESEUS

Say what thou wilt; for thou art not silent as it is.

THEBAN HERALD

Thou shalt never take the sons of Argos from our land.

THESEUS

Hear, then, my answer too to that, if so thou wilt.

THEBAN HERALD

I will hear thee; not that I wish it, but I must give thee thy turn.

THESEUS

I will bury the dead, when from Asopus' land I have removed them.

THEBAN HERALD

First must thou adventure somewhat in the front of war.

THESEUS

Many an enterprise and of a different kind have I ere this endured.

THEBAN HERALD

Wert thou then begotten of thy sire to cope with every foe?

THESEUS

Ay, with all wanton villains; virtue I punish not.

THEBAN HERALD

To meddle is aye thy wont and thy city's too.

THESEUS

Hence her enterprise on many a field hath won her many blessings.

THEBAN HERALD

Come then, that the warriors of the dragon-crop may catch thee in our city.

THESEUS

What furious warrior-host could spring from dragon's seed?

THEBAN HERALD

Thou shalt learn that to thy cost. As yet thou art young and rash.

THESEUS

Thy boastful speech stirs not my heart at all to rage. Yet get thee gone from my land, taking with thee the idle words thou broughtest; for we are making no advance. (*The* THEBAN HERALD *withdraws.*) 'Tis time for all to start, each stout footman, and whoso mounts the car; 'tis time the bit, dripping with foam, should urge the charger on toward the land of Cadmus. For I will march in person to the seven gates thereof with the sharp sword in my hand, and be myself my herald. But thee, Adrastus, I bid stay, nor blend with mine thy fortunes, for I will take my own good star to lead my host, a chieftain famed in famous deeds of arms. One thing alone I need, the favour of all gods that reverence right, for the presence of these things insures victory. For their valour availeth men naught, unless they have the god's goodwill.

(THESEUS *and his retinue depart. The following lines between the* SEMI-CHORUSES *are chanted responsively.*)

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Unhappy mothers of those hapless chiefs! How wildly in my heart pale fear stirs up alarm!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What is this new cry thou utterest?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I fear the issue of the strife, whereto the hosts of Pallas march.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Dost speak of issues of the sword, or interchange of words?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

That last were gain indeed; but if the carnage of battle, fighting, and the noise of beaten breasts again be heard in the land, what, alas! will be said of me, who am the cause thereof?

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

Yet may fate again bring low the brilliant victor; 'tis this brave thought that twines about my heart.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Thou speak'st of the gods as if they were just.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

For who but they allot whate'er betides?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

I see much at variance in their dealings with men.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

The former fear hath warped thy judgment. Vengeance calls vengeance forth; slaughter calls for slaughter, but the gods give respite from affliction, holding in their own hands each thing's allotted end.

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Would I could reach yon plains with turrets crowned, leaving Callichorus, fountain of the goddess!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

O that some god would give me wings to fly to the city of rivers twain!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

So might'st thou see and know the fortunes of thy friends.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

What fate, what issue there awaits the valiant monarch of this land?

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

Once more do we invoke the gods we called upon before; yea, in our fear this is our first and chiefest trust.

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

O Zeus, father to the child the heifer-mother bore in days long past, that daughter of Inachus!

FIRST SEMI-CHORUS

O be gracious, I pray, and champion this city!

SECOND SEMI-CHORUS

'Tis thy own darling, thy own settler in the city of Argos that I am striving from outrage to rescue for the funeral pyre.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Ladies, I bring you tidings of great joy, myself escaped—for I was taken prisoner in the battle which cost those chieftains seven their lives near Dirce's fount—to bear the news of Theseus' victory. But I will save thee tedious questioning; I was the servant of Capaneus, whom Zeus with scorching bolt to ashes burnt.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Friend of friends, fair thy news of thy own return, nor less the news about Theseus; and if the host of Athens, too, is safe, welcome will all thy message be.

MESSENGER

'Tis safe, and all hath happened as I would it had befallen Adrastus and his Argives, whom from Inachus he led, to march against the city of the Cadmeans.

LEADER

How did the son of Aegeus and his fellow-warriors raise their trophy to Zeus? Tell us, for thou wert there and canst gladden us who were not.

MESSENGER

Bright shone the sun, one levelled line of light, upon the world, as by Electra's gate I stood to watch, from a turret with a far outlook. And lo! I saw the host in three divisions, deploying its mail-clad warriors on the high ground by the banks of Ismenus; this last I heard; and with them was the king himself, famous son of Aegeus; his own men, natives of old Cecropia, were ranged upon the right; while on the left, hard by the fountain of Ares, were the dwellers by the sea, harnessed spearmen they; on either wing were posted cavalry, in equal numbers, and chariots were stationed in the shelter of Amphion's holy tomb. Meantime, the folk of Cadmus set themselves before the walls, placing in the rear the bodies for which they fought. Horse to horse, and car to car stood ranged. Then did the herald of Theseus cry aloud to all: "Be still, ye folk! hush, ye ranks of Cadmus, hearken! we are come to fetch the bodies of the slain, wishing to bury them in observance of the universal law of Hellas; no

wish have we to lengthen out the slaughter." Not a word would Creon let his herald answer back, but there he stood in silence under arms. Then did the drivers of the four-horse cars begin the fray; on, past each other they drave their chariots, bringing the warriors at their sides up into line. Some fought with swords, some wheeled the horses back to the fray again for those they drove. Now when Phorbas, who captained the cavalry of the Erechtheidae, saw the thronging chariots, he and they who had the charge of the Theban horse met hand to hand, and by turns were victors and vanquished. The many horrors happening there I saw, not merely heard about, for I was at the spot where the chariots and their riders met and fought, but which to tell of first I know not,—the clouds of dust that mounted to the sky, the warriors tangled in the reins and dragged this way and that, the streams of crimson gore, when men fell dead, or when, from shattered chariot-seats, they tumbled headlong to the ground, and, mid the splinters of their cars, gave up the ghost. But Creon, when he marked our cavalry's success on one wing, caught up a shield and rushed into the fray, ere that despondency should seize his men; but not for that did Theseus recoil in fear; no! snatching up at once his glittering harness he hied him on. And the twain, clashing their shields together as they met in the midst of the assembled host, were dealing death and courting it, shouting loudly each to his fellow the battle-cry: "Slay, and with thy spear strike home against the sons of Erechtheus." Fierce foes to cope with were the warriors whom the dragon's teeth to manhood reared; so fierce, they broke our left wing, albeit theirs was routed by our right and put to flight, so that the struggle was evenly balanced. Here again our chief deserved all praise, for this success was not the only one he gained; no! next he sought that part of his army which was wavering; and loud he called to them, that the earth rang again, "My sons, if ye cannot restrain the earth-born warriors' stubborn spear, the cause of Pallas is lost." His word inspired new courage in all the Danaid host. Therewith himself did seize a fearsome mace, weapon of Epidaurian warfare, and swung it to and fro, and with that club, as with a sickle, he shore off necks and heads and helmets thereupon. Scarce even then they turned themselves to fly. I cried aloud for joy, and danced and clapped my hands; while to the gates they ran. Throughout the town echoed the shrieks of young and old, as they crowded the temples in terror. But Theseus, when he might have come inside the walls, held back his men, for he had not come, said he, to sack the town, but to ask for the bodies of the dead. Such the general men should choose, one who shows his bravery in danger, yet hates the pride of those that in their hour of fortune lose the bliss they might have enjoyed, through seeking to scale the ladder's topmost step.

LEADER

Now do I believe in the gods after seeing this unexpected day, and I feel my woes are lighter now that these have paid their penalty.

ADRASTUS

O Zeus, why do men assert the wisdom of the wretched human race? On thee we all depend, and all we do is only what thou listest. We thought our Argos irresistible, ourselves a young and lusty host, and so when Eteocles was for making terms, in spite of his fair offer we would not accept them, and so we perished. Then in their turn those foolish folk of Cadmus, to fortune raised, like some beggar with his newly-gotten wealth, waxed wanton, and, waxing so, were ruined in their turn. Ye foolish sons of men! who strain your bow like men who shoot beyond their mark, and only by suffering many evils as ye deserve, though deaf to friends, yet yield to circumstances; ye cities likewise, though ye might by parley end your ills, yet ye choose the sword instead of reason to settle all disputes. But wherefore these reflections? This I fain would learn, the way thou didst escape; and after that I will ask thee of the rest.

MESSENGER

During the uproar which prevailed in the city owing to the battle, I passed the gates, just as the host had entered them.

ADRASTUS

Are ye bringing the bodies, for the which the strife arose?

MESSENGER

Ay, each of the seven chiefs who led their famous hosts.

ADRASTUS

What sayest thou? the rest who fell—say, where are they?

MESSENGER

They have found burial in the dells of Cithaeron.

ADRASTUS

On this or that side of the mount? And who did bury them?

MESSENGER

Theseus buried them 'neath the shadow of Eleutherae's cliff.

ADRASTUS

Where didst thou leave the dead he hath not buried?

MESSENGER

Not far away; earnest haste makes every goal look close.

ADRASTUS

No doubt in sorrow slaves would gather them from the carnage.

MESSENGER

Slaves! not one of them was set to do this toil.

[*A speech belonging to* ADRASTUS *has been lost.*]

MESSENGER

Thou wouldst say so, hadst thou been there to see his loving tendance of the dead.

ADRASTUS

Did he himself wash the bloody wounds of the hapless youths?

MESSENGER

Ay, and strewed their biers and wrapped them in their shrouds.

ADRASTUS

An awful burden this, involving some disgrace.

MESSENGER

Why, what disgrace to men are their fellows' sorrows?

ADRASTUS

Ah me! how much rather had I died with them!

MESSENGER

'Tis vain to weep and move to tears these women.

ADRASTUS

Methinks 'tis they who give the lesson. Enough of that! My hands I lift at meeting of the dead, and pour forth a tearful dirge to Hades, calling on my friends, whose loss I mourn in wretched solitude; for this one thing, when once 'tis spent, man cannot recover, the breath of life, though he knoweth ways to get his wealth again.

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Joy is here and sorrow too,—for the state fair fame, and for our captains double meed of honour. Bitter for me it is to see the limbs of my dead sons, and yet a welcome sight withal, because I shall behold the unexpected day after sorrow's cup was full.

antistrophe

Would that Father Time had kept me unwed from my youth up e'en till now when I am old! What need had I of children? Methinks

I should not have suffered overmuch, had I never borne the marriage-yoke; but now I have my sorrow full in view, the loss of children dear.

Lo! I see the bodies of the fallen youths. Woe is me! would I could join these children in their death and descend to Hades with them!

(THESEUS *and his soldiers enter, carrying the corpses of the slain chieftains.* ADRASTUS *and the* CHORUS *chant the lament responsively.*)

ADRASTUS

Mothers, raise the wail for the dead departed; cry in answer when ye hear my note of woe.

CHORUS

My sons, my sons! O bitter words for loving mothers to address to you! To thee, my lifeless child, I call.

ADRASTUS

Woe! woe!

CHORUS

Ah me, my sufferings!

ADRASTUS

Alas! We have endured, alas!—

CHORUS

Sorrows most grievous.

ADRASTUS

O citizens of Argos! do ye not behold my fate?

CHORUS

They see thee, and me the hapless mother, reft of her children.

ADRASTUS

Bring near the blood-boltered corpses of those hapless chiefs, foully slain by foes unworthy, with whom lay the decision of the contest.

CHORUS

Let me embrace and hold my children to my bosom in my enfolding arms.

ADRASTUS

There, there! thou hast—

CHORUS

Sorrows heavy enough to bear.

ADRASTUS

Ah me!

CHORUS

Thy groans mingle with those of their parents.

ADRASTUS

Hear me.

CHORUS

O'er both of us thou dost lament.

ADRASTUS

Would God the Theban ranks had laid me dead in the dust!

CHORUS

Oh that I had ne'er been wedded to a husband!

ADRASTUS

Ah! hapless mothers, behold this sea of troubles!

CHORUS

Our nails have ploughed our cheeks in furrows, and o'er our heads have we strewn ashes.

ADRASTUS

Ah me! ah me! Oh that earth's floor would swallow me, or the whirlwind snatch me away, or Zeus's flaming bolt descend upon my head!

CHORUS

Bitter the marriages thou didst witness, bitter the oracle of Phoebus! The curse of Oedipus, fraught with sorrow, after desolating his house, is come on thee.

THESEUS

I meant to question thee when thou wert venting thy lamentations to the host, but I will let it pass; yet, though I dropped the matter then and left it alone, I now do ask Adrastus, "Of what lineage sprang those youths, to shine so bright in chivalry?" Tell it to our younger citizens of thy fuller wisdom, for thou art skilled to know. Myself beheld their daring deeds,

too high for words to tell, whereby they thought to capture Thebes. One question will I spare thee, lest I provoke thy laughter; the foe that each of them encountered in the fray, the spear from which each received his death-wound. These be idle tales alike for those who hear or him who speaks, that any man amid the fray, when clouds of darts are hurtling before his eyes, should declare for certain who each champion is. I could not ask such questions, nor yet believe those who dare assert the like; for when a man is face to face with the foe, he scarce can see even that which 'tis his bounden duty to observe.

ADRASTUS

Hearken then. For in giving this task to me thou findest a willing eulogist of friends, whose praise I would declare in all truth and sincerity. Dost see yon corpse by Zeus's bolt transfixed? That is Capaneus; though he had ample wealth, yet was he the last to boast of his prosperity; nor would he ever vaunt himself above a poorer neighbour, but shunned the man whose sumptuous board had puffed him up too high and made him scorn mere competence, for he held that virtue lies not in greedy gluttony, but that moderate means suffice. True friend was he, alike to present or to absent friends the same; of such the number is not great. His was a guileless character, a courteous address, that left no promise unperformed either towards his own household or his fellow-citizens. The next I name is Eteoclus; a master he of other kinds of excellence; young, nor richly dowered with store, yet high in honour in the Argive land. And though his friends oft offered gifts of gold, he would not have it in his house, to make his character its slave by taking wealth's yoke upon him. Not his city, but those that sinned against her did he hate, for a city is no wise to be blamed if it get an evil name by reason of an evil governor. Such another was Hippomedon, third of all this band; from his very boyhood he refrained from turning towards the allurements of the Muses, to lead a life of ease; his home was in the fields, and gladly would he school his nature to hardships with a view to manliness, aye hasting to the chase, rejoicing in his steeds or straining of his bow, because he would make himself of use unto his state. Next behold the huntress Atalanta's son, Parthenopaeus, a youth of peerless beauty; from Arcady he came even to the streams of Inachus, and in Argos spent his boyhood. There, when he grew to man's estate, first, as is the duty of strangers settled in another land, he showed no pique or jealousy against the state, became no quibbler, chiefest source of annoyance citizen or stranger can give, but took his stand amid the host, and fought for Argos as he were her own son, glad at heart whenso the city prospered, deeply grieved if e'er reverses came; many a lover though he had midst men and maids, yet was he careful to avoid offence. Of Tydeus next the lofty praise I will express in brief; no

brilliant spokesman he, but a clever craftsman in the art of war, with many a shrewd device; inferior in judgment to his brother Meleager, yet through his warrior skill lending his name to equal praise, for he had found in arms a perfect science; his was an ambitious nature, a spirit rich in store of deeds, with words less fully dowered. From this account then wonder not, Theseus, that they dared to die before the towers; for noble nurture carries honour with it, and every man, when once he hath practised virtue, scorns the name of villain. Courage may be learnt, for even a babe doth learn to speak and hear things it cannot comprehend; and whatso'er a child hath learnt, this it is his wont to treasure up till he is old. So train up your children in a virtuous way.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alas! my son, to sorrow I bare thee and carried thee within my womb, enduring the pangs of travail; but now Hades takes the fruit of all my hapless toil, and I that had a son am left, ah me! with none to nurse my age.

THESEUS

As for the noble son of Oecleus, him, while yet he lived, the gods snatched hence to the bowels of the earth, and his chariot too, manifestly blessing him; while I myself may truthfully tell the praises of the son of Oedipus, that is, Polyneices, for he was my guest-friend ere he left the town of Cadmus and crossed to Argos in voluntary exile. But dost thou know what I would have thee do in this?

ADRASTUS

I know naught save this,—to yield obedience to thy hests.

THESEUS

As for yon Capaneus, stricken by the bolt of Zeus—

ADRASTUS

Wilt bury him apart as a consecrated corpse?

THESEUS

Even so; but all the rest on one funeral pyre.

ADRASTUS

Where wilt thou set the tomb apart for him?

THESEUS

Here near this temple have I builded him a sepulchre.

ADRASTUS

Thy thralls forthwith must undertake this toil.

THESEUS

Myself will look to those others; let the biers advance.

ADRASTUS

Approach your sons, unhappy mothers.

THESEUS

This thy proposal, Adrastus, is anything but good.

ADRASTUS

Must not the mothers touch their sons?

THESEUS

It would kill them to see how they are altered.

ADRASTUS

'Tis bitter, truly, to see the dead even at the moment of death.

THESEUS

Why then wilt thou add fresh grief to them?

ADRASTUS

Thou art right. Ye needs must patiently abide, for the words of Theseus are good. But when we have committed them unto the flames, ye shall collect their bones. O wretched sons of men! Why do ye get you weapons and bring slaughter on one another? Cease therefrom, give o'er your toiling, and in mutual peace keep safe your cities. Short is the span of life, so 'twere best to run its course as lightly as we may, from trouble free.

(*The corpses, followed by the* CHILDREN *of the slain chieftains, are carried off to the pyre which is kindled within the sight of the persons on the stage.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

No more a happy mother I, with children blest; no more I share, among Argive women, who have sons, their happy lot; nor any more will Artemis in the hour of travail kindly greet these childless mothers. Most dreary is my life, and like some wandering cloud I drift before the howling blast.

antistrophe

The seven noblest sons in Argos once we had, we seven hapless mothers; but now my sons are dead, I have no child, and on me steals old age in piteous wise, nor 'mongst the dead nor 'mongst the living do I count myself, having as it were a lot apart from these.

epode

Tears alone are left me; in my house sad memories of my son are stored; mournful tresses shorn from his head, chaplets that he wore, libations for the dead departed, and songs, but not such as golden-haired Apollo welcometh; and when I wake to weep, my tears will ever drench the folds of my robe upon my bosom. Ah! there I see the sepulchre ready e'en now for Capaneus, his consecrated tomb, and the votive offerings Theseus gives unto the dead outside the shrine, and nigh yon lightning-smitten chief I see his noble bride, Evadne, daughter of King Iphis. Wherefore stands she on the towering rock, which o'ertops this temple, advancing along yon path?

(EVADNE *is seen on a rock which overhangs the burning pyre. She is dressed as though for a festival.*)

EVADNE (*chanting*)

What light, what radiancy did the sun-god's car dart forth, and the moon athwart the firmament, while round her in the gloom swift stars careered, in the day that the city of Argos raised the stately chant of joy at my wedding, in honour of my marriage with mail-clad Capaneus? Now from my home in frantic haste with frenzied mind I rush to join thee, seeking to share with thee the fire's bright flame and the self-same tomb, to rid me of my weary life in Hades' halls, and of the pains of life; yea, for 'tis the sweetest end to share the death of those we love, if only fate will sanction it.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Behold yon pyre, which thou art overlooking, nigh thereto, set apart for Zeus! There is thy husband's body, vanquished by the blazing bolt.

EVADNE (*chanting*)

Life's goal I now behold from my station here; may fortune aid me in my headlong leap from this rock in honour's cause, down into the fire below, to mix my ashes in the ruddy blaze with my husband's, to lay me side by side with him, there in the couch of Persephone; for ne'er will I, to save my life, prove untrue to thee where thou liest in thy grave. Away with life and marriage too! Oh! may my children live to see the dawn of a fairer, happier wedding-day in Argos! May loyalty inspire the husband's heart, his nature fusing with his wife's!

LEADER

Lo! the aged Iphis, thy father, draweth nigh to hear thy startling speech, which yet he knows not and will grieve to learn.

(IPHIS *enters.*)

IPHIS

Unhappy child! lo! I am come, a poor old man, with twofold sorrow in my house to mourn, that I may carry to his native land the corpse of my son Eteoclus, slain by the Theban spear, and further in quest of my daughter who rushed headlong from the house, for she was the wife of Capaneus and longed with him to die. Ere this she was well guarded in my house, but, when I took the watch away in the present troubles, she escaped. But I feel sure that she is here; tell me if ye have seen her.

EVADNE

Why question them? Lo, here upon the rock, father, o'er the pyre of Capaneus, like some bird I hover lightly, in my wretchedness.

IPHIS

What wind hath blown thee hither, child? Whither thy journey? Why didst thou pass the threshold of my house and seek this land?

EVADNE

It would but anger thee to hear what I intend, and so I fain would keep thee ignorant, my father.

IPHIS

What! hath not thy own father a right to know?

EVADNE

Thou wouldst not wisely judge my purpose.

IPHIS

Why dost thou deck thyself in that apparel?

EVADNE

A purport strange this robe conveys, father.

IPHIS

Thou hast no look of mourning for thy lord.

EVADNE

No, the reason why I thus am decked is strange, maybe.

IPHIS

Dost thou in such garb appear before a funeral-pyre?

EVADNE

Yea, for hither it is I come to take the meed of victory.

IPHIS

"Victory!" What victory? This would I learn of thee.

EVADNE

A victory o'er all women on whom the sun looks down.

IPHIS

In Athena's handiwork or in prudent counsel?

EVADNE

In bravery; for I will lay me down and die with my lord.

IPHIS

What dost thou say? What is this silly riddle thou propoundest?

EVADNE

To yonder pyre where lies dead Capaneus, I will leap down.

IPHIS

My daughter, speak not thus before the multitude!

EVADNE

The very thing I wish, that every Argive should learn it.

IPHIS

Nay, I will ne'er consent to let thee do this deed.

EVADNE

'Tis all one; thou shalt never catch me in thy grasp. Lo! I cast me down, no joy to thee, but to myself and to my husband blazing on the pyre with me.

(*She leaps into the pyre.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O lady, thou hast done a fearful deed!

IPHIS

Ah me! I am undone, ye dames of Argos!

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alack, alack! a cruel blow is this to thee, but thou must yet witness, poor wretch, the full horror of this deed.

IPHIS

A more unhappy wretch than me ye could not find.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Woe for thee, unhappy man! Thou, old sir, hast been made partaker in the fortune of Oedipus, thou and my poor city too.

IPHIS

Ah, why are mortal men denied this boon, to live their youth twice o'er, and twice in turn to reach old age? If aught goes wrong within our homes, we set it right by judgment more maturely formed, but our life we may not so correct. Now if we had a second spell of youth and age, this double term of life would let us then correct each previous slip. For I, seeing others blest with children, longed to have them too, and found my ruin in that wish. Whereas if I had had my present experience, and by a father's light had learnt how cruel a thing it is to be bereft of children, never should I have fallen on such evil days as these,—I who did beget a brave young son, proud parent that I was, and after all am now bereft of him. Enough of this. What remains for such a hapless wretch as me? Shall I to my home, there to see its utter desolation and the blank within my life? or shall I to the halls of that dead Capaneus?—halls I smiled to see in days gone by, when yet my daughter was alive. But she is lost and gone, she that would ever draw down my cheek to her lips, and take my head between her hands; for naught is there more sweet unto an aged sire than a daughter's love; our sons are made of sterner stuff, but less winning are their caresses. Oh! take me to my house at once, in darkness hide me there, to waste and fret this aged frame with fasting! What shall it avail me to touch my daughter's bones? Old age, resistless foe, how do I loathe thy presence! Them too I hate, whoso desire to lengthen out the span of life, seeking to turn the tide of death aside by philtres, drugs, and magic spells, —folk that death should take away to leave the young their place, when they no more can benefit the world.

(IPHIS *departs. A procession enters from the direction of the pyre, led by the* CHILDREN *of the slain chieftains, who carry the ashes of their fathers in funeral urns. The following lines between the* CHORUS *and the* CHILDREN *are chanted responsively.*)

CHORUS

Woe, woe! Behold your dead sons' bones are brought hither; take them, servants of your weak old mistress, for in me is no strength left by reason of my mourning for my sons; time's comrade long have I been, and many a tear for many a sorrow have I shed. For what sharper pang wilt thou ever find for mortals than the sight of children dead?

CHILDREN

Poor mother mine, behold I bring my father's bones gathered from the fire, a burden grief has rendered heavy, though this tiny urn contains my all.

CHORUS

Ah me! ah me! Why bear thy tearful load to the fond mother of the dead, a handful of ashes in the stead of those who erst were men of mark in Mycenae?

CHILDREN

Woe worth the hour! woe worth the day! Reft of my hapless sire, a wretched orphan shall I inherit a desolate house, torn from my father's arms.

CHORUS

Woe is thee! Where is now the toil I spent upon my sons? what thank have I for nightly watch? Where the mother's nursing care? the sleepless vigils mine eyes have kept? the loving kiss upon my children's brow?

CHILDREN

Thy sons are dead and gone. Poor mother! dead and gone; the boundless air now wraps them round.

CHORUS

Turned to ashes by the flame, they have winged their flight to Hades.

CHILDREN

Father, thou hearest thy children's lamentation; say, shall I e'er, as warrior dight, avenge thy slaughter?

CHORUS

God grant it, O my child!

CHILDREN

Some day, if god so will, shall the avenging of my father be my task; not yet this sorrow sleeps.

CHORUS

Alas! Fortune's sorrows are enough for me, I have enough of troubles now.

CHILDREN

Shall Asopus' laughing tide ever reflect my brazen arms as I lead on my Argive troops?

CHORUS

To avenge thy fallen sire.

CHILDREN

Methinks I see thee still before my eyes, my father—

CHORUS

Printing a loving kiss upon thy cheek.

CHILDREN

But thy words of exhortation are borne on the winds away.

CHORUS

Two mourners hath he left behind, thy mother and thee, bequeathing to thee an endless legacy of grief for thy father.

CHILDREN

The weight of grief I have to bear hath crushed me utterly.

CHORUS

Come, let me clasp the ashes of my son to my bosom.

CHILDREN

I weep to hear that piteous word; it stabs me to the heart.

CHORUS

My child, thou art undone; no more shall I behold thee, thy own fond mother's treasure.

THESEUS

Adrastus, and ye dames from Argos sprung, ye see these children bearing in their hands the bodies of their valiant sires whom I redeemed; to thee I give these gifts, I and Athens. And ye must bear in mind the memory of this favour, marking well the treatment ye have had of me. And to these children I repeat the self-same words, that they may honour this city, to children's children ever handing on the kindness ye received from us. Be Zeus the witness, with the gods in heaven, of the treatment we vouchsafed you ere you left us.

ADRASTUS

Theseus, well we know all the kindness thou hast conferred upon the land of Argos in her need, and ours shall be a gratitude that never waxeth old, for your generous treatment makes us debtors for a like return.

THESEUS

What yet remains, wherein I can serve you?

ADRASTUS

Fare thee well, for such is thy desert and such thy city's too.

THESEUS

Even so. Mayst thou too have the self-same fortune!

(ATHENA *appears from above.*)

ATHENA

Hearken, Theseus, to the words that I Athena utter, telling thee thy duty, which, if thou perform it, will serve thy city. Give not these bones to the children to carry to the land of Argos, letting them go so lightly; nay, take first an oath of them that they will requite thee and thy city for your efforts. This oath must Adrastus swear, for as their king it is his right to take the oath for the whole realm of Argos. And this shall be the form thereof: "We Argives swear we never will against this land lead on our mail-clad troops to war, and, if others come, we will repel them." But if they violate their oath and come against the city, pray that the land of Argos may be miserably destroyed. Now hearken while I tell thee where thou must slay the victims. Thou hast within thy halls a tripod with brazen feet, which Heracles, in days gone by, after he had o'erthrown the foundations of Ilium and was starting on another enterprise, enjoined thee to set up at the Pythian shrine. O'er it cut the throats of three sheep; then grave within the tripod's hollow belly the oath; this done, deliver it to the god who watches over Delphi to keep, a witness and memorial unto Hellas of the oath. And bury the sharp-edged knife, wherewith thou shalt have laid the victims open and shed their blood, deep in the bowels of the earth, hard by the pyres where the seven chieftains burn; for its appearance shall strike them with dismay, if e'er against thy town they come, and shall cause them to return with sorrow. When thou hast done all this, dismiss the dead from thy land. And to the god resign as sacred land the spot where their bodies were purified by fire, there by the meeting of the triple roads that lead unto the Isthmus. Thus much to thee, Theseus, I address; next to the sons of Argos I speak; when ye are grown to men's estate, the town beside Ismenus shall ye sack, avenging the slaughter of your dead sires; thou too, Aegialeus, shalt take thy father's place and in thy youth command the host, and with thee Tydeus' son marching from Aetolia,—him whom his father named Diomedes. Soon as the beards your cheeks o'ershadow must ye lead an armed Danaid host against the battlements of Thebes with sevenfold gates. For to their sorrow shall ye come like lion's whelps in full-grown might to sack their city. No otherwise is it to be; and ye shall be a theme for minstrels' songs in days to come, known through Hellas as "the After-born"; so famous shall your expedition be, thanks to Heaven.

THESEUS

Queen Athena, I will hearken to thy bidding; for thou it is dost set me up, so that I go not astray. And I will bind this monarch by an oath; do

thou but guide my steps aright. For if thou art friendly to our state, we shall henceforth live secure.

(ATHENA *vanishes.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Let us go, Adrastus, and take the oath to this monarch and his state; for the service they have already done us claims our reverence.

THE translation of Coleridge has been slightly modified in the following lines: 178, 237, 430, 521, 577, 612, 632, 708, 719, 748, 791, 932, 1005, 1032, 1048, 1053, 1087, 1149, 1234.

1. The first portion of this speech calls to mind Prometheus' account of his benefits to man in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound,* as well as Sophocles' famous chorus on man in the *Antigone.*

2. Some words seem to have been lost at the beginning of this choral ode.

3. This refers to the monster Phaea, which infested the neighbourhood of Corinth.

4. This passage may be compared with Plato's description of tyranny and the tyrant in the *Republic,* Books VIII and IX.

5. *i.e.,* Amphiaraus.

VIII
THE TROJAN WOMEN

Characters in the Play

The God Poseidon
The Goddess Pallas Athena
Hecuba, *Queen of Troy, wife of Priam, mother of Hector and Paris*
Cassandra, *daughter of Hecuba, a prophetess*
Andromache, *wife of Hector, Prince of Troy*
Helen, *wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta; carried off by Paris, Prince of Troy*
Talthybius, *Herald of the Greeks*
Menelaus, *King of Sparta, and, together with his brother Agamemnon, General of the Greeks*
Soldiers attendant on Talthybius and Menelaus
Chorus of Captive Trojan Women, young and old, maiden and married

INTRODUCTION

WHEN any one reads the plays of Euripides in their chronological order, insofar as it can be known, he becomes aware that the poet's thought is increasingly marked by a pervading sense of disillusionment. One can feel a firmness of grasp in the *Hippolytus* or the *Medea* which is apparently not present in the later plays. Certainly in *The Trojan Women* we do not even have a counterpart to Euripides' underlying optimism and confidence in Athens and her institutions which distinguish both *The Heracleidae* and *The Suppliants*. On the contrary we feel that the poet has become a man whose faith is failing him and yet one who believed that faith in some form must be maintained.

In a very fundamental sense *The Trojan Women* seems to reflect Euripides' reaction to a shattered ideal. The play, produced in the spring of 415 B.C., followed closely upon the siege and capture of the island of Melos by the Athenians. In a spirit of cold-blooded and brutal imperialism, Athens had taken the island, massacred the adult male population, and sold the women and children as slaves. Melos' only crime had been that she wished to remain neutral. The whole episode is treated brilliantly by Thucydides, who is unmitigated in his condemnation of the crime. It is not surprising therefore that Euripides' illusion of a great and just democratic Athens crumbled into nothing. Even at the very moment when the play appeared, the same military faction which had determined upon the action against Melos was still in power and was gathering its forces to embark upon the ill-fated expedition against Sicily.

The Trojan Women perhaps from the point of view of structure is not strictly speaking a play, but rather is a tragic pageant which presents one facet of that far greater tragedy, war itself. Inspired by the Melian incident, Euripides centres his attention upon what happens to the women and the children of the conquered, and how the conquerors, having gained their most desired end, inevitably are led to transgress the will of Heaven. The story of Troy immediately after its fall provides the poet with the medium through which he can express his ideas. He places before us one after another of the captive women in a series of harrowing scenes, the tension of which is lifted periodically by relieving choral odes. Practi-

cally without rival for sheer pathos at its best is the scene in which Talthybius, the Greek herald, takes from Andromache her son Astyanax. On the basis of this and similar passages, it has been argued, though not convincingly, that Euripides in his effort to produce pathos has overstepped the limits set by true tragedy.

The emotional strain of the whole play perhaps would be intolerable, were it not for the fact that there is in these women, though utterly desolated, inspiring courage and the capacity to endure whatever may follow. It is in this way that Euripides has expressed his ultimate belief in man's dignity and worth and strength. For example, we know from his portrayal of Andromache that she will live, and on some terms will live greatly, even though now she regards death as the highest of goods. The delineation of Hecuba likewise reveals man's seemingly limitless ability to bear suffering. But the play as a whole is most impressive as an indictment against war. When the poet juxtaposes the conquered, in the persons of these women, and the conqueror, in the person of Menelaus, who, though he has regained Helen, finds that he has won nothing, we have a situation which proclaims in powerful accents the cruelty, folly, and futility of war. European literature can boast a no more potent document on this theme than *The Trojan Women.*

THE TROJAN WOMEN

(*The scene represents a battlefield, a few days after the battle. At the back are the walls of Troy, partially ruined. In front of them, to right and left, are some huts, containing those of the Captive Women who have been specially set apart for the chief Greek leaders. At one side some dead bodies of armed men are visible. In front a tall woman with white hair is lying on the ground asleep.*
It is the dusk of early dawn, before sunrise. The figure of the god POSEIDON *is dimly seen before the walls.*)

POSEIDON

UP FROM Aegean caverns, pool by pool
Of blue salt sea, where feet most beautiful
Of Nereid maidens weave beneath the foam
Their long sea-dances, I, their lord, am come,
Poseidon of the Sea. 'Twas I whose power,
With great Apollo, builded tower by tower
These walls of Troy; and still my care doth stand
True to the ancient People of my hand;
Which now as smoke is perished, in the shock
Of Argive spears. Down from Parnassus' rock
The Greek Epeios came, of Phocian seed,
And wrought by Pallas' mysteries a Steed
Marvellous, big with arms; and through my wall
It passed, a death-fraught image magical.
The groves are empty and the sanctuaries
Run red with blood. Unburied Priam lies
By his own hearth, on God's high altar-stair,
And Phrygian gold goes forth and raiment rare
To the Argive ships; and weary soldiers roam
Waiting the wind that blows at last for home,
For wives and children, left long years away,
Beyond the seed's tenth fullness and decay,

To work this land's undoing.
And for me,
Since Argive Hera conquereth, and she
Who wrought with Hera to the Phrygians' woe,
Pallas, behold, I bow mine head and go
Forth from great Ilion and mine altars old.
When a still city lieth in the hold
Of Desolation, all God's spirit there
Is sick and turns from worship.—Hearken where
The ancient River waileth with a voice
Of many women, portioned by the choice
Of war amid new lords, as the lots leap
For Thessaly, or Argos, or the steep
Of Theseus' Rock. And others yet there are,
High women, chosen from the waste of war
For the great kings, behind these portals hid;
And with them that Laconian Tyndarid,
Helen, like them a prisoner and a prize.
And this unhappy one—would any eyes
Gaze now on Hecuba? Here at the Gates
She lies 'mid many tears for many fates
Of wrong. One child beside Achilles' grave
In secret slain, Polyxena the brave,
Lies bleeding. Priam and his sons are gone;
And, lo, Cassandra, she the Chosen One,
Whom Lord Apollo spared to walk her way
A swift and virgin spirit, on this day
Lust hath her, and she goeth garlanded
A bride of wrath to Agamemnon's bed.
(*He turns to go; and another divine Presence becomes visible in the dusk. It is the goddess* PALLAS ATHENA.)
O happy long ago, farewell, farewell,
Ye shining towers and mine old citadel;
Broken by Pallas, Child of God, or still
Thy roots had held thee true.

PALLAS
Is it the will
Of God's high Brother, to whose hand is given
Great power of old, and worship of all Heaven,
To suffer speech from one whose enmities
This day are cast aside?

POSEIDON

His will it is:
Kindred and long companionship withal,
Most high Athena, are things magical.

PALLAS

Blest be thy gentle mood!—Methinks I see
A road of comfort here, for thee and me.

POSEIDON

Thou hast some counsel of the Gods, or word
Spoken of Zeus? Or is it tidings heard
From some far Spirit?

PALLAS

For this Ilion's sake,
Whereon we tread, I seek thee, and would make
My hand as thine.

POSEIDON

Hath that old hate and deep
Failed, where she lieth in her ashen sleep?
Thou pitiest her?

PALLAS

Speak first; wilt thou be one
In heart with me and hand till all be done?

POSEIDON

Yea; but lay bare thy heart. For this land's sake
Thou comest, not for Hellas?

PALLAS

I would make
Mine ancient enemies laugh for joy, and bring
On these Greek ships a bitter homecoming.

POSEIDON

Swift is thy spirit's path, and strange withal,
And hot thy love and hate, where'er they fall.

PALLAS

A deadly wrong they did me, yea within
Mine holy place: thou knowest?

POSEIDON

I know the sin
Of Ajax, when he cast Cassandra down [1] . . .

PALLAS

And no man rose and smote him; not a frown
Nor word from all the Greeks!

POSEIDON

And 'twas thine hand
That gave them Troy!

PALLAS

Therefore with thee I stand
To smite them.

POSEIDON

All thou cravest, even now
Is ready in mine heart. What seekest thou?

PALLAS

An homecoming that striveth ever more
And cometh to no home.

POSEIDON

Here on the shore
Wouldst hold them or amid mine own salt foam?

PALLAS

When the last ship hath bared her sail for home!
Zeus shall send rain, long rain and flaw of driven
Hail, and a whirling darkness blown from heaven;
To me his levin-light he promiseth
O'er ships and men, for scourging and hot death:
Do thou make wild the roads of the sea, and steep
With war of waves and yawning of the deep,
Till dead men choke Euboea's curling bay.
So Greece shall dread even in an after day
My house, nor scorn the Watchers of strange lands!

POSEIDON

I give thy boon unbartered. These mine hands
Shall stir the waste Aegean; reefs that cross
The Delian pathways, jag-torn Myconos,
Scyros and Lemnos, yea, and storm-driven
Caphereus with the bones of drownèd men

Shall glut him.—Go thy ways, and bid the Sire
Yield to thine hand the arrows of his fire.
Then wait thine hour, when the last ship shall wind
Her cable coil for home!

(*Exit* PALLAS)

How are ye blind,
Ye treaders down of cities, ye that cast
Temples to desolation, and lay waste
Tombs, the untrodden sanctuaries where lie
The ancient dead; yourselves so soon to die!

(*Exit* POSEIDON)

(*The day slowly dawns:* HECUBA *wakes.*)

HECUBA (*chanting*)

Up from the earth, O weary head!
  This is not Troy, about, above—
  Not Troy, nor we the lords thereof.
Thou breaking neck, be strengthenèd!

Endure and chafe not. The winds rave
  And falter. Down the world's wide road,
  Float, float where streams the breath of God;
Nor turn thy prow to breast the wave.

Ah woe! . . . For what woe lacketh here?
  My children lost, my land, my lord.
  O thou great wealth of glory, stored
Of old in Ilion, year by year

We watched . . . and wert thou nothingness?
  What is there that I fear to say?
  And yet, what help? . . . Ah, well-a-day,
This ache of lying, comfortless

And haunted! Ah, my side, my brow
  And temples! All with changeful pain
  My body rocketh, and would fain
Move to the tune of tears that flow:
For tears are music too, and keep
A song unheard in hearts that weep.

(*She rises and gazes towards the Greek ships far off on the shore.*)

O ships, O crowding faces
  Of ships, O hurrying beat
  Of oars as of crawling feet,
How found ye our holy places?
Threading the narrows through,
  Out from the gulfs of the Greek,
Out to the clear dark blue,
  With hate ye came and with joy,
And the noise of your music flew,
  Clarion and pipe did shriek,
As the coilèd cords ye threw,
  Held in the heart of Troy!

What sought ye then that ye came?
  A woman, a thing abhorred:
  A King's wife that her lord
Hateth: and Castor's shame
  Is hot for her sake, and the reeds
Of old Eurotas stir
With the noise of the name of her.
  She slew mine ancient King,
  The Sower of fifty Seeds,
    And cast forth mine and me,
  As shipwrecked men, that cling
    To a reef in an empty sea.

Who am I that I sit
  Here at a Greek king's door,
Yea, in the dust of it?
  A slave that men drive before,
A woman that hath no home,
  Weeping alone for her dead;
  A low and bruisèd head,
And the glory struck therefrom.
(*She starts up from her solitary brooding, and calls to the other Trojan Women in the huts.*)

O Mothers of the Brazen Spear,
  And maidens, maidens, brides of shame,
  Troy is a smoke, a dying flame;
Together we will weep for her:
I call ye as a wide-wing'd bird
  Calleth the children of her fold,

To cry, ah, not the cry men heard
In Ilion, not the songs of old,
That echoed when my hand was true
On Priam's sceptre, and my feet
Touched on the stone one signal beat,
And out the Dardan music rolled;
And Troy's great Gods gave ear thereto.
(*The door of one of the huts on the right opens, and the Women steal out severally, startled and afraid.*)

FIRST WOMAN

strophe 1

How say'st thou? Whither moves thy cry,
Thy bitter cry? Behind our door
We heard thy heavy heart outpour
Its sorrow: and there shivered by
Fear and a quick sob shaken
From prisoned hearts that shall be free no more!

HECUBA

Child, 'tis the ships that stir upon the shore . . .

SECOND WOMAN

The ships, the ships awaken!

THIRD WOMAN

Dear God, what would they? Overseas
Bear me afar to strange cities?

HECUBA

Nay, child, I know not. Dreams are these,
Fears of the hope-forsaken.

FIRST WOMAN

Awake, O daughters of affliction, wake
And learn your lots! Even now the Argives break
Their camp for sailing!

HECUBA

Ah, not Cassandra! Wake not her
Whom God hath maddened, lest the foe
Mock at her dreaming. Leave me clear
From that one edge of woe.
O Troy, my Troy, thou diest here
Most lonely; and most lonely we

The living wander forth from thee,
And the dead leave thee wailing!
(*One of the huts on the left is now open, and the rest of the* CHORUS *come out severally. Their number eventually amounts to fifteen.*)

FOURTH WOMAN

antistrophe 1

Out of the tent of the Greek king
I steal, my Queen, with trembling breath:
What means thy call? Not death; not death!
They would not slay so low a thing!

FIFTH WOMAN

O, 'tis the ship-folk crying
To deck the galleys: and we part, we part!

HECUBA

Nay, daughter: take the morning to thine heart.

FIFTH WOMAN

My heart with dread is dying!

SIXTH WOMAN

An herald from the Greek hath come!

FIFTH WOMAN

How have they cast me, and to whom
A bondmaid?

HECUBA

Peace, child: wait thy doom.
Our lots are near the trying.

FOURTH WOMAN

Argos, belike, or Phthia shall it be,
Or some lone island of the tossing sea,
Far, far from Troy?

HECUBA

And I the agèd, where go I,
A winter-frozen bee, a slave
Death-shapen, as the stones that lie
Hewn on a dead man's grave:
The children of mine enemy
To foster, or keep watch before

The threshold of a master's door,
I that was Queen in Troy!

A Woman to Another

strophe 2

And thou, what tears can tell thy doom?

The Other

The shuttle still shall flit and change
Beneath my fingers, but the loom,
Sister, be strange.

Another (*wildly*)

Look, my dead child! My child, my love,
The last look. . . .

Another

Oh, there cometh worse.
A Greek's bed in the dark. . . .

Another

God curse
That night and all the powers thereof!

Another

Or pitchers to and fro to bear
To some Pirene on the hill,
Where the proud water craveth still
Its broken-hearted minister.

Another

God guide me yet to Theseus' land,
The gentle land, the famed afar . . .

Another

But not the hungry foam—Ah, never!—
Of fierce Eurotas, Helen's river,
To bow to Menelaus' hand,
That wasted Troy with war!

A Woman

antistrophe 2

They told us of a land high-born,
Where glimmers round Olympus' roots
A lordly river, red with corn
And burdened fruits.

ANOTHER

Aye, that were next in my desire
To Athens, where good spirits dwell . . .

ANOTHER

Or Aetna's breast, the deeps of fire
That front the Tyrian's Citadel:
First mother, she, of Sicily
And mighty mountains: fame hath told
Their crowns of goodness manifold. . . .

ANOTHER

And, close beyond the narrowing sea,
A sister land, where float enchanted
Ionian summits, wave on wave,
And Crathis of the burning tresses
Makes red the happy vale, and blesses
With gold of fountains spirit-haunted
Homes of true men and brave!

LEADER

But lo, who cometh: and his lips
Grave with the weight of dooms unknown:
A Herald from the Grecian ships.
Swift comes he, hot-foot to be done
And finished. Ah, what bringeth he
Of news or judgment? Slaves are we,
Spoils that the Greek hath won!
(TALTHYBIUS, *followed by some Soldiers, enters from the left.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Thou know'st me, Hecuba. Often have I crossed
Thy plain with tidings from the Hellene host.
'Tis I, Talthybius. . . . Nay, of ancient use
Thou know'st me. And I come to bear thee news.

HECUBA

Ah me, 'tis here, 'tis here,
Women of Troy, our long embosomed fear!

TALTHYBIUS

The lots are cast, if that it was ye feared.

HECUBA

What lord, what land. . . . Ah me,
Phthia or Thebes, or sea-worn Thessaly?

TALTHYBIUS

Each hath her own. Ye go not in one herd.

HECUBA

Say then what lot hath any? What of joy
Falls, or can fall, on any child of Troy?

TALTHYBIUS

I know: but make thy question severally.

HECUBA

My stricken one must be
Still first. Say how Cassandra's portion lies.

TALTHYBIUS

Chosen from all for Agamemnon's prize!

HECUBA

How, for his Spartan bride
A tirewoman? For Helen's sister's pride?

TALTHYBIUS

Nay, nay: a bride herself, for the King's bed.

HECUBA

The sainted of Apollo? And her own
Prize that God promisèd
Out of the golden clouds, her virgin crown? . . .

TALTHYBIUS

He loved her for that same strange holiness.

HECUBA

Daughter, away, away,
Cast all away,
The haunted Keys,[2] the lonely stole's array
That kept thy body like a sacred place!

TALTHYBIUS

Is't not rare fortune that the King hath smiled
On such a maid?

HECUBA

What of that other child
Ye reft from me but now?

TALTHYBIUS (*speaking with some constraint*)

Polyxena? Or what child meanest thou?

HECUBA

The same. What man now hath her, or what doom?

TALTHYBIUS

She rests apart, to watch Achilles' tomb.

HECUBA

To watch a tomb? My daughter? What is this? . . .
Speak, Friend? What fashion of the laws of Greece?

TALTHYBIUS

Count thy maid happy! She hath naught of ill
To fear . . .

HECUBA

What meanest thou? She liveth still?

TALTHYBIUS

I mean, she hath one toil that holds her free
From all toil else.

HECUBA

What of Andromache,
Wife of mine iron-hearted Hector, where
Journeyeth she?

TALTHYBIUS

Pyrrhus, Achilles' son, hath taken her.

HECUBA

And I, whose slave am I,
The shaken head, the arm that creepeth by,
Staff-crutchèd, like to fall?

TALTHYBIUS

Odysseus, Ithaca's king, hath thee for thrall.

HECUBA

Beat, beat the crownless head:
Rend the cheek till the tears run red!

A lying man and a pitiless
Shall be lord of me, a heart full-flown
With scorn of righteousness:
O heart of a beast where law is none,
Where all things change so that lust be fed,
The oath and the deed, the right and the wrong,
Even the hate of the forkèd tongue:
Even the hate turns and is cold,
False as the love that was false of old!

O Women of Troy, weep for me!
Yea, I am gone: I am gone my ways.
Mine is the crown of misery,
The bitterest day of all our days.

LEADER

Thy fate thou knowest, Queen: but I know not
What lord of South or North has won my lot.

TALTHYBIUS

Go, seek Cassandra, men! Make your best speed,
That I may leave her with the King, and lead
These others to their divers lords. . . . Ha, there!
What means that sudden light? Is it the flare
Of torches?
(*Light is seen shining through the crevices of the second hut on the right. He moves towards it.*)
Would they fire their prison rooms,
Or how, these women?—Yes, 'fore God, the dooms
Are known, and now they burn themselves and die
Rather than sail with us! How savagely
In days like these a free neck chafes beneath
Its burden! . . . Open! Open quick! Such death
Were bliss to them, it may be: but 'twill bring
Much wrath, and leave me shamed before the King!

HECUBA

There is no fire, no peril: 'tis my child,
Cassandra, by the breath of God made wild.
(*The door opens from within and* CASSANDRA *enters, white-robed and wreathed like a Priestess, a great torch in her hand. She is singing softly to herself and does not see the Herald or the scene before her.*)

CASSANDRA

strophe

Lift, lift it high:
Give it to mine hand!
Lo, I bear a flame
Unto God! I praise his name.
I light with a burning brand
This sanctuary.
Blessèd is he that shall wed,
And blessèd, blessèd am I
In Argos: a bride to lie
With a king in a king's bed.

Hail, O Hymen red,
O Torch that makest one!
Weepest thou, Mother mine own?
Surely thy cheek is pale
With tears, tears that wail
For a land and a father dead.
But I go garlanded:
I am the Bride of Desire:
Therefore my torch is borne—
Lo, the lifting of morn,
Lo, the leaping of fire!—

For thee, O Hymen bright,
For thee, O Moon of the Deep,
So Law hath charged, for the light
Of a maid's last sleep.

antistrophe

Awake, O my feet, awake:
Our father's hope is won!
Dance as the dancing skies
Over him, where he lies
Happy beneath the sun! . . .
Lo, the Ring that I make . . .
(*She makes a circle round her with a torch, and visions appear to her.*)
Apollo! . . . Ah, is it thou?
O shrine in the laurels cold,
I bear thee still, as of old,
Mine incense! Be near to me now.
(*She waves the torch as though bearing incense.*)

O Hymen, Hymen fleet:
  Quick torch that makest one! . . .
  How? Am I still alone?
Laugh as I laugh, and twine
In the dance, O Mother mine:
  Dear feet, be near my feet!

Come, greet ye Hymen, greet
  Hymen with songs of pride:
Sing to him loud and long,
Cry, cry, when the song
  Faileth, for joy of the bride!

O Damsels girt in the gold
  Of Ilion, cry, cry ye,
For him that is doomed of old
  To be lord of me!

LEADER

O hold the damsel, lest her trancèd feet
Lift her afar, Queen, toward the Hellene fleet!

HECUBA

O Fire, Fire, where men make marriages
Surely thou hast thy lot; but what are these
Thou bringest flashing? Torches savage-wild
And far from mine old dreams.—Alas, my child,
How little dreamed I then of wars or red
Spears of the Greek to lay thy bridal bed!
Give me thy brand; it hath no holy blaze
Thus in thy frenzy flung. Nor all thy days
Nor all thy griefs have changed them yet, nor learned
Wisdom.—Ye women, bear the pine half burned
To the chamber back; and let your drownèd eyes
Answer the music of these bridal cries!
(*She takes the torch and gives it to one of the women.*)

CASSANDRA

O Mother, fill mine hair with happy flowers,
And speed me forth. Yea, if my spirit cowers,
Drive me with wrath! So liveth Loxias,
A bloodier bride than ever Helen was
Go I to Agamemnon, Lord most high
Of Hellas! [3] . . . I shall kill him, mother; I

Shall kill him, and lay waste his house with fire
As he laid ours. My brethren and my sire
Shall win again . . .
(*Checking herself*) But part I must let be,
And speak not. Not the axe that craveth me,
And more than me; not the dark wanderings
Of mother-murder that my bridal brings,
And all the House of Atreus down, down, down . . .

Nay, I will show thee. Even now this town
Is happier than the Greeks. I know the power
Of God is on me: but this little hour,
Wilt thou but listen, I will hold him back!
One love, one woman's beauty, o'er the track
Of hunted Helen, made their myriads fall.
And this their King so wise, who ruleth all,
What wrought he? Cast out Love that Hate might feed:
Gave to his brother his own child, his seed
Of gladness, that a woman fled, and fain
To fly for ever, should be turned again!
So the days waned, and armies on the shore
Of Simois stood and strove and died. Wherefore?
No man had moved their landmarks; none had shook
Their wallèd towns.—And they whom Ares took,
Had never seen their children: no wife came
With gentle arms to shroud the limbs of them
For burial, in a strange and angry earth
Laid dead. And there at home, the same long dearth:
Women that lonely died, and aged men
Waiting for sons that ne'er should turn again,
Nor know their graves, nor pour drink-offerings,
To still the unslakèd dust. These be the things
The conquering Greek hath won!
But we—what pride,
What praise of men were sweeter?—fighting died
To save our people. And when war was red
Around us, friends upbore the gentle dead
Home, and dear women's hands about them wound
White shrouds, and here they sleep in the old ground
Belovèd. And the rest long days fought on,
Dwelling with wives and children, not alone
And joyless, like these Greeks.
And Hector's woe,

What is it? He is gone, and all men know
His glory, and how true a heart he bore.
It is the gift the Greek hath brought! Of yore
Men saw him not, nor knew him. Yea, and even
Paris hath loved withal a child of heaven:
Else had his love but been as others are.
Would ye be wise, ye Cities, fly from war!
Yet if war come, there is a crown in death
For her that striveth well and perisheth
Unstained: to die in evil were the stain!
Therefore, O Mother, pity not thy slain,
Nor Troy, nor me, the bride. Thy direst foe
And mine by this my wooing is brought low.

TALTHYBIUS

(*at last breaking through the spell that has held him*)
I swear, had not Apollo made thee mad,
Not lightly hadst thou flung this shower of bad
Bodings, to speed my General o'er the seas!
'Fore God, the wisdoms and the greatnesses
Of seeming, are they hollow all, as things
Of naught? This son of Atreus, of all kings
Most mighty, hath so bowed him to the love
Of this mad maid, and chooseth her above
All women! By the Gods, rude though I be,
I would not touch her hand!
Look thou; I see
Thy lips are blind, and whatso words they speak,
Praises of Troy or shamings of the Greek,
I cast to the four winds! Walk at my side
In peace! . . . And heaven content him of his bride!
(*He moves as though to go, but turns to* HECUBA, *and speaks more gently.*)
And thou shalt follow to Odysseus' host
When the word comes. 'Tis a wise queen thou go'st
To serve, and gentle: so the Ithacans say.

CASSANDRA

(*seeing for the first time the Herald and all the scene*)
How fierce a slave! . . . O Heralds, Heralds! Yea,
Voices of Death; and mists are over them
Of dead men's anguish, like a diadem,
These weak abhorrèd things that serve the hate

Of kings and peoples! . . .
To Odysseus' gate
My mother goeth, say'st thou? Is God's word
As naught, to me in silence ministered,
That in this place she dies? . . . (*To herself*) No more; no more!
Why should I speak the shame of them, before
They come? . . . Little he knows, that hard-beset
Spirit, what deeps of woe await him yet;
Till all these tears of ours and harrowings
Of Troy, by his, shall be as golden things.
Ten years behind ten years athwart his way
Waiting: and home, lost and unfriended . . .
Nay:
Why should Odysseus' labours vex my breath?
On; hasten; guide me to the house of Death,
To lie beside my bridegroom! . . .
Thou Greek King,
Who deem'st thy fortune now so high a thing,
Thou dust of the earth, a lowlier bed I see,
In darkness, not in light, awaiting thee:
And with thee, with thee . . . there, where yawneth plain
A rift of the hills, raging with winter rain,
Dead . . . and outcast . . . and naked . . . It is I
Beside my bridegroom: and the wild beasts cry,
And ravin on God's chosen!
(*She clasps her hands to her brow and feels the wreaths.*)
O, ye wreaths!
Ye garlands of my God, whose love yet breathes
About me; shapes of joyance mystical;
Begone! I have forgot the festival,
Forgot the joy. Begone! I tear ye, so,
From off me! . . . Out on the swift winds they go.
With flesh still clean I give them back to thee,
Still white, O God, O light that leadest me!
(*Turning upon the Herald*)
Where lies the galley? Whither shall I tread?
See that your watch be set, your sail be spread.
The wind comes quick! . . . Three Powers[4]—mark me, thou!—
There be of Hell, and one walks with thee now!
Mother, farewell, and weep not! O my sweet
City, my earth-clad brethren, and thou great

Sire that begat us; but a little now,
And I am with you: yea, with shining brow
I come, ye Dead, and shining from the fall
Of Atreus' House, the House that wrecked us all!
(*She goes out, followed by* TALTHYBIUS *and the Soldiers;* HECUBA, *after waiting for an instant motionless, falls to the ground.*)

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

The Queen, ye Watchers! See, she falls, she falls,
Rigid without a word! O sorry thralls,
Too late! And will ye leave her downstricken,
A woman, and so old? Raise her again!
(*Some women go to* HECUBA, *but she refuses their aid and speaks without rising.*)

HECUBA

Let lie . . . the love we seek not is no love . . .
This ruined body! Is the fall thereof
Too deep for all that now is over me
Of anguish, and hath been, and yet shall be?
Ye Gods . . . Alas! Why call on things so weak
For aid? Yet there is something that doth seek,
Crying, for God, when one of us hath woe.
O, I will think of things gone long ago
And weave them to a song, like one more tear
In the heart of misery. . . . All kings we were;
And I must wed a king. And sons I brought
My lord King, many sons . . . nay, that were naught;
But high strong princes, of all Troy the best.
Hellas nor Troäs nor the garnered East
Held such a mother! And all these things beneath
The Argive spear I saw cast down in death,
And shore these tresses at the dead men's feet.
Yea, and the gardener of my garden great,
It was not any noise of him nor tale
I wept for; these eyes saw him, when the pale
Was broke, and there at the altar Priam fell
Murdered, and round him all his citadel
Sacked. And my daughters, virgins of the fold,
Meet to be brides of mighty kings, behold,
'Twas for the Greek I bred them! All are gone;
And no hope left, that I shall look upon
Their faces any more, nor they on mine.

And now my feet tread on the utmost line:
An old, old slave-woman, I pass below
Mine enemies' gates; and whatso task they know
For this age basest, shall be mine; the door,
Bowing, to shut and open. . . . I that bore
Hector! . . . and meal to grind, and this racked head
Bend to the stones after a royal bed;
Torn rags about me, aye, and under them
Torn flesh; 'twill make a woman sick for shame!
Woe's me; and all that one man's arms might hold
One woman, what long seas have o'er me rolled
And roll for ever! . . . O my child, whose white
Soul laughed amid the laughter of God's light,
Cassandra, what hands and how strange a day
Have loosed thy zone! And thou, Polyxena,
Where art thou? And my sons? Not any seed
Of man nor woman now shall help my need.
Why raise me any more? What hope have I
To hold me? Take this slave that once trod high
In Ilion; cast her on her bed of clay
Rock-pillowed, to lie down, and pass away
Wasted with tears. And whatso man they call
Happy, believe not ere the last day fall! [5]

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

O Muse, be near me now, and make
A strange song for Ilion's sake,
Till a tone of tears be about mine ears
And out of my lips a music break
For Troy, Troy, and the end of the years:
When the wheels of the Greek above me pressed,
And the mighty horse-hoofs beat my breast;
And all around were the Argive spears
A towering Steed of golden rein—
O gold without, dark steel within!—
Ramped in our gates; and all the plain
Lay silent where the Greeks had been.
And a cry broke from all the folk
Gathered above on Ilion's rock:
"Up, up, O fear is over now!
To Pallas, who hath saved us living,
To Pallas bear this victory-vow!"

Then rose the old man from his room,
The merry damsel left her loom,
And each bound death about his brow
With minstrelsy and high thanksgiving!

antistrophe

O, swift were all in Troy that day,
And girt them to the portal-way,
Marvelling at that mountain Thing
Smooth-carven, where the Argives lay,
And wrath, and Ilion's vanquishing:
Meet gift for her that spareth not,
Heaven's yokeless Rider.[6] Up they brought
Through the steep gates her offering:
Like some dark ship that climbs the shore
On straining cables, up, where stood
Her marble throne, her hallowed floor,
Who lusted for her people's blood.

A very weariness of joy
Fell with the evening over Troy:
And lutes of Afric mingled there
With Phrygian songs: and many a maiden,
With white feet glancing light as air,
Made happy music through the gloom:
And fires on many an inward room
All night broad-flashing, flung their glare
On laughing eyes and slumber-laden.

A Maiden

I was among the dancers there
To Artemis, and glorying sang
Her of the Hills, the Maid most fair,
Daughter of Zeus: and, lo, there rang
A shout out of the dark, and fell
Deathlike from street to street, and made
A silence in the citadel:
And a child cried, as if afraid,
And hid him in his mother's veil.
Then stalked the Slayer from his den,
The hand of Pallas served her well!
O blood, blood of Troy was deep
About the streets and altars then:
And in the wedded rooms of sleep,

Lo, the desolate dark alone,
And headless things, men stumbled on.

And forth, lo, the women go,
The crown of War, the crown of Woe,
To bear the children of the foe
And weep, weep, for Ilion!

(*As the song ceases a chariot is seen approaching from the town, laden with spoils. On it sits a mourning Woman with a child in her arms.*)

LEADER

Lo, yonder on the heapèd crest
Of a Greek wain, Andromache,
As one that o'er an unknown sea
Tosseth; and on her wave-borne breast
Her loved one clingeth, Hector's child,
Astyanax . . . O most forlorn
Of women, whither go'st thou, borne
'Mid Hector's bronzen arms, and piled
Spoils of the dead, and pageantry
Of them that hunted Ilion down?
Aye, richly thy new lord shall crown
The mountain shrines of Thessaly!

ANDROMACHE

strophe 1

Forth to the Greek I go,
Driven as a beast is driven.[7]

HECUBA

Woe, woe!

ANDROMACHE

Nay, mine is woe:
Woe to none other given,
And the song and the crown therefor!

HECUBA

O Zeus!

ANDROMACHE

He hates thee sore!

HECUBA

Children!

ANDROMACHE

No more, no more
To aid thee: their strife is striven!

HECUBA

antistrophe 1

Troy, Troy is gone!

ANDROMACHE

Yea, and her treasure parted.

HECUBA

Gone, gone, mine own
Children, the noble-hearted!

ANDROMACHE

Sing sorrow. . . .

HECUBA

For me, for me!

ANDROMACHE

Sing for the Great City,
That falleth, falleth to be
A shadow, a fire departed.

ANDROMACHE

strophe 2

Come to me, O my lover!

HECUBA

The dark shroudeth him over,
My flesh, woman, not thine, not thine!

ANDROMACHE

Make of thine arms my cover!

HECUBA

antistrophe 2

O thou whose wound was deepest,
Thou that my children keepest,
Priam, Priam, O age-worn King,
Gather me where thou sleepest.

ANDROMACHE (*her hands upon her heart*)
strophe 3

O here is the deep of desire,

HECUBA
(How? And is this not woe?)

ANDROMACHE
For a city burned with fire;

HECUBA
(It beateth, blow on blow.)

ANDROMACHE
God's wrath for Paris, thy son, that he died not long ago:
Who sold for his evil love
Troy and the towers thereof:
Therefore the dead men lie
Naked, beneath the eye
Of Pallas, and vultures croak
And flap for joy:
So Love hath laid his yoke
On the neck of Troy!

HECUBA
antistrophe 3

O mine own land, my home,

ANDROMACHE
(I weep for thee, left forlorn,)

HECUBA
See'st thou what end is come?

ANDROMACHE
(And the house where my babes were born.)

HECUBA
A desolate Mother we leave, O children, a City of scorn:

Even as the sound of a song [8]
Left by the way, but long
Remembered, a tune of tears
Falling where no man hears,
In the old house, as rain,
For things loved of yore:

But the dead hath lost his pain
And weeps no more.

LEADER

How sweet are tears to them in bitter stress,
And sorrow, and all the songs of heaviness.

ANDROMACHE

Mother of him of old, whose mighty spear
Smote Greeks like chaff, see'st thou what things are here?

HECUBA

I see God's hand, that buildeth a great crown
For littleness, and hath cast the mighty down.

ANDROMACHE

I and my babe are driven among the droves
Of plundered cattle. O, when fortune moves
So swift, the high heart like a slave beats low.

HECUBA

'Tis fearful to be helpless. Men but now
Have taken Cassandra, and I strove in vain.

ANDROMACHE

Ah, woe is me; hath Ajax come again?
But other evil yet is at thy gate.

HECUBA

Nay, Daughter, beyond number, beyond weight
My evils are! Doom raceth against doom.

ANDROMACHE

Polyxena across Achilles' tomb
Lies slain, a gift flung to the dreamless dead.

HECUBA

My sorrow! . . . 'Tis but what Talthybius said:
So plain a riddle, and I read it not.

ANDROMACHE

I saw her lie, and stayed this chariot;
And raiment wrapt on her dead limbs, and beat
My breast for her.

HECUBA (*to herself*)
O the foul sin of it!
The wickedness! My child. My child! Again
I cry to thee. How cruelly art thou slain!

ANDROMACHE
She hath died her death, and howso dark it be,
Her death is sweeter than my misery.

HECUBA
Death cannot be what Life is, Child; the cup
Of Death is empty, and Life hath always hope.

ANDROMACHE
O Mother, having ears, hear thou this word
Fear-conquering, till thy heart as mine be stirred
With joy. To die is only not to be;
And better to be dead than grievously
Living. They have no pain, they ponder not
Their own wrong. But the living that is brought
From joy to heaviness, his soul doth roam,
As in a desert, lost, from its old home.
Thy daughter lieth now as one unborn,
Dead, and naught knowing of the lust and scorn
That slew her. And I . . . long since I drew my bow
Straight at the heart of good fame; and I know
My shaft hit; and for that am I the more
Fallen from peace. All that men praise us for,
I loved for Hector's sake, and sought to win.
I knew that alway, be there hurt therein
Or utter innocence, to roam abroad
Hath ill report for women; so I trod
Down the desire thereof, and walked my way
In mine own garden. And light words and gay
Parley of women never passed my door.
The thoughts of mine own heart . . . I craved no more . . .
Spoke with me, and I was happy. Constantly
I brought fair silence and a tranquil eye
For Hector's greeting, and watched well the way
Of living, where to guide and where obey.
And, lo! some rumour of this peace, being gone
Forth to the Greek, hath cursed me. Achilles' son,
So soon as I was taken, for his thrall
Chose me. I shall do service in the hall

Of them that slew . . . How? Shall I thrust aside
Hector's belovèd face, and open wide
My heart to this new lord? Oh, I should stand
A traitor to the dead! And if my hand
And flesh shrink from him . . . lo, wrath and despite
O'er all the house, and I a slave!
One night,
One night . . . aye, men have said it . . . maketh tame
A woman in a man's arms. . . . O shame, shame!
What woman's lips can so forswear her dead,
And give strange kisses in another's bed?
Why, not a dumb beast, not a colt will run
In the yoke untroubled, when her mate is gone—
A thing not in God's image, dull, unmoved
Of reason. O my Hector! best beloved,
That, being mine, wast all in all to me,
My prince, my wise one, O my majesty
Of valiance! No man's touch had ever come
Near me, when thou from out my father's home
Didst lead me and make me thine. . . . And thou art dead,
And I war-flung to slavery and the bread
Of shame in Hellas, over bitter seas!
What knoweth she of evils like to these,
That dead Polyxena, thou weepest for?
There liveth not in my life any more
The hope that others have. Nor will I tell
The lie to mine own heart, that aught is well
Or shall be well. . . . Yet, O, to dream were sweet!

LEADER

Thy feet have trod the pathway of my feet,
And thy clear sorrow teacheth me mine own.

HECUBA

Lo, yonder ships: I ne'er set foot on one,
But tales and pictures tell, when over them
Breaketh a storm not all too strong to stem,
Each man strives hard, the tiller gripped, the mast
Manned, the hull baled, to face it: till at last
Too strong breaks the o'erwhelming sea: lo, then
They cease, and yield them up as broken men
To fate and the wild waters. Even so
I in my many sorrows bear me low,
Nor curse, nor strive that other things may be.

The great wave rolled from God hath conquered me.
But, O, let Hector and the fates that fell
On Hector, sleep. Weep for him ne'er so well,
Thy weeping shall not wake him. Honour thou
The new lord that is set above thee now,
And make of thine own gentle piety
A prize to lure his heart. So shalt thou be
A strength to them that love us, and—God knows,
It may be—rear this babe among his foes,
My Hector's child, to manhood and great aid
For Ilion. So her stones may yet be laid
One on another, if God will, and wrought
Again to a city! Ah, how thought to thought
Still beckons! . . . But what minion of the Greek
Is this that cometh, with new words to speak?
(*Enter* TALTHYBIUS *with a band of Soldiers. He comes forward slowly and with evident disquiet.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Spouse of the noblest heart that beat in Troy,
Andromache, hate me not! 'Tis not in joy
I tell thee. But the people and the Kings
Have with one voice . . .

ANDROMACHE

What is it? Evil things
Are on thy lips!

TALTHYBIUS

'Tis ordered, this child . . . Oh,
How can I tell her of it?

ANDROMACHE

Doth he not go
With me, to the same master?

TALTHYBIUS

There is none
In Greece, shall e'er be master of thy son.

ANDROMACHE

How? Will they leave him here to build again
The wreck? . . .

TALTHYBIUS
I know not how to tell thee plain!

ANDROMACHE
Thou hast a gentle heart . . . if it be ill,
And not good, news thou hidest!

TALTHYBIUS
'Tis their will
Thy son shall die. . . . The whole vile thing is said
Now!

ANDROMACHE
Oh, I could have bourne mine enemy's bed!

TALTHYBIUS
And speaking in the council of the host
Odysseus hath prevailed—

ANDROMACHE
O lost! lost! lost! . . .
Forgive me! It is not easy . . .

TALTHYBIUS
. . . That the son
Of one so perilous be not fostered on
To manhood—

ANDROMACHE
God; may his own counsel fall
On his own sons!

TALTHYBIUS
. . . But from this crested wall
Of Troy be dashed, and die. . . . Nay, let the thing
Be done. Thou shalt be wiser so. Nor cling
So fiercely to him. Suffer as a brave
Woman in bitter pain; nor think to have
Strength which thou hast not. Look about thee here!
Canst thou see help, or refuge anywhere?
Thy land is fallen and thy lord, and thou
A prisoner and alone, one woman; how
Canst battle against us? For thine own good
I would not have thee strive, nor make ill blood
And shame about thee. . . . Ah, nor move thy lips
In silence there, to cast upon the ships

Thy curse! One word of evil to the host,
This babe shall have no burial, but be tossed
Naked. . . . Ah, peace! And bear as best thou may,
War's fortune. So thou shalt not go thy way
Leaving this child unburied; nor the Greek
Be stern against thee, if thy heart be meek!

ANDROMACHE (*to the child*)

Go, die, my best-beloved, my cherished one,
In fierce men's hands, leaving me here alone.
Thy father was too valiant; that is why
They slay thee! Other children, like to die,
Might have been spared for that. But on thy head
His good is turned to evil.
O thou bed
And bridal; O the joining of the hand,
That led me long ago to Hector's land
To bear, O not a lamb for Grecian swords
To slaughter, but a Prince o'er all the hordes
Enthroned of wide-flung Asia. . . . Weepest thou?
Nay, why, my little one? Thou canst not know.
And Father will not come; he will not come;
Not once, the great spear flashing, and the tomb
Riven to set thee free! Not one of all
His brethren, nor the might of Ilion's wall.
How shall it be? One horrible spring . . . deep, deep
Down. And thy neck . . . Ah God, so cometh sleep! . . .
And none to pity thee! . . . Thou little thing
That curlest in my arms, what sweet scents cling
All round thy neck! Belovèd; can it be
All nothing, that this bosom cradled thee
And fostered; all the weary nights, wherethrough
I watched upon thy sickness, till I grew
Wasted with watching? Kiss me. This one time;
Not ever again. Put up thine arms, and climb
About my neck: now, kiss me, lips to lips. . . .
O, ye have found an anguish that outstrips
All tortures of the East, ye gentle Greeks!
Why will ye slay this innocent, that seeks
No wrong? . . . O Helen, Helen, thou ill tree
That Tyndareus planted, who shall deem of thee
As child of Zeus? O, thou hast drawn thy breath
From many fathers, Madness, Hate, red Death,

And every rotting poison of the sky!
Zeus knows thee not, thou vampire, draining dry.
Greece and the world! God hate thee and destroy,
That with those beautiful eyes hast blasted Troy,
And made the far-famed plains a waste withal.
Quick! take him: drag him: cast him from the wall,
If cast ye will! Tear him, ye beasts, be swift!
God hath undone me, and I cannot lift
One hand, one hand, to save my child from death . . .
O, hide my head for shame: fling me beneath
Your galleys' benches! . . .
(*She swoons: then half-rising*)
Quick: I must begone
To the bridal. . . . I have lost my child, my own!
(*The Soldiers close round her.*)

LEADER

O Troy ill-starred; for one strange woman, one
Abhorrèd kiss, how are thine hosts undone!

TALTHYBIUS

(*bending over* ANDROMACHE *and gradually taking the Child from her*)
Come, Child: let be that clasp of love
Outwearied! Walk thy ways with me,
Up to the crested tower, above
Thy father's wall . . . Where they decree
Thy soul shall perish.—Hold him: hold!—
Would God some other man might ply
These charges, one of duller mould,
And nearer to the iron than I!

HECUBA

O Child, they rob us of our own,
Child of my Mighty One outworn:
Ours, ours thou art!—Can ought be done
Of deeds, can aught of pain be borne,
To aid thee?—Lo, this beaten head,
This bleeding bosom! These I spread
As gifts to thee. I can thus much.
Woe, woe for Troy, and woe for thee!
What fall yet lacketh, ere we touch
The last dead deep of misery?
(*The Child, who has started back from* TALTHYBIUS,
is taken up by one of the Soldiers and borne back

towards the city, while ANDROMACHE *is set again on the Chariot and driven off towards the ships.* TALTHYBIUS *goes with the Child.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)[9]

strophe 1

In Salamis, filled with the foaming
Of billows and murmur of bees,
Old Telamon stayed from his roaming,
Long ago, on a throne of the seas;
Looking out on the hills olive-laden,
Enchanted, where first from the earth
The grey-gleaming fruit of the Maiden
Athena had birth;
A soft grey crown for a city
Belovèd, a City of Light:
Yet he rested not there, nor had pity,
But went forth in his might,
Where Heracles wandered, the lonely
Bow-bearer, and lent him his hands
For the wrecking of one land only,
Of Ilion, Ilion only,
Most hated of lands!

antistrophe 1

Of the bravest of Hellas he made him
A ship-folk, in wrath for the Steeds,
And sailed the wide waters, and stayed him
At last amid Simois' reeds;
And the oars beat slow in the river,
And the long ropes held in the strand,
And he felt for his bow and his quiver,
The wrath of his hand.
And the old king died; and the towers
That Phoebus had builded did fall,
And his wrath, as a flame that devours,
Ran red over all;
And the fields and the woodlands lay blasted,
Long ago. Yea, twice hath the Sire
Uplifted his hand and downcast it
On the wall of the Dardan, downcast it
As a sword and as fire.

strophe 2

In vain, all in vain,
O thou 'mid the wine-jars golden
That movest in delicate joy,
Ganymedes, child of Troy,
The lips of the Highest drain
The cup in thine hand upholden:
And thy mother, thy mother that bore thee,
Is wasted with fire and torn;
And the voice of her shores is heard,
Wild, as the voice of a bird,
For lovers and children before thee
Crying, and mothers outworn.
And the pools of thy bathing are perished,
And the wind-strewn ways of thy feet:
Yet thy face as aforetime is cherished
Of Zeus, and the breath of it sweet;
Yea, the beauty of Calm is upon it
In houses at rest and afar.
But thy land, He hath wrecked and o'erthrown it
In the wailing of war.

antistrophe 2

O Love, ancient Love,
Of old to the Dardan given;
Love of the Lords of the Sky;
How didst thou lift us high
In Ilion, yea, and above
All cities, as wed with heaven!
For Zeus—O leave it unspoken:
But alas for the love of the Morn;
Morn of the milk-white wing,
The gentle, the earth-loving,
That shineth on battlements broken
In Troy, and a people forlorn!
And, lo, in her bowers Tithonus,
Our brother, yet sleeps as of old:
O, she too hath loved us and known us,
And the Steeds of her star, flashing gold,
Stooped hither and bore him above us;
Then blessed we the Gods in our joy.
But all that made them to love us
Hath perished from Troy.

(*As the song ceases, the King* MENELAUS *enters, richly armed and followed by a bodyguard of Soldiers. He is a prey to violent and conflicting emotions.*)

MENELAUS

How bright the face of heaven, and how sweet
The air this day, that layeth at my feet
The woman that I . . . Nay: 'twas not for her
I came. 'Twas for the man, the cozener
And thief, that ate with me and stole away
My bride. But Paris lieth, this long day,
By God's grace, under the horse-hoofs of the Greek,
And round him all his land. And now I seek . . .
Curse her! I scarce can speak the name she bears,
That was my wife. Here with the prisoners
They keep her, in these huts, among the hordes
Of numbered slaves.—The host whose labouring swords
Won her, have given her up to me, to fill
My pleasure; perchance kill her, or not kill,
But lead her home.—Methinks I have foregone
The slaying of Helen here in Ilion . . .
Over the long seas I will bear her back,
And there, there, cast her out to whatso wrack
Of angry death they may devise, who know
Their dearest dead for her in Ilion.—Ho!
Ye soldiers! Up into the chambers where
She croucheth! Grip the long blood-reeking hair,
And drag her to mine eyes . . . (*controlling himself*)
And when there come
Fair breezes, my long ships shall bear her home.

(*The Soldiers go to force open the door of the second hut on the left.*)

HECUBA

Thou deep Base of the World, and thou high Throne
Above the World, whoe'er thou art, unknown
And hard of surmise, Chain of Things that be,
Or Reason of our Reason; God, to thee
I lift my praise, seeing the silent road
That bringeth justice ere the end be trod
To all that breathes and dies.

MENELAUS (*turning*)
Ha! who is there
That prayeth heaven, and in so strange a prayer?

HECUBA
I bless thee, Menelaus, I bless thee,
If thou wilt slay her! Only fear to see
Her visage, lest she snare thee and thou fall!
She snareth strong men's eyes; she snareth tall
Cities; and fire from out her eateth up
Houses. Such magic hath she, as a cup
Of death! . . . Do I not know her? Yea, and thou,
And these that lie around, do they not know?
(*The Soldiers return from the hut and stand aside to let* HELEN *pass between them. She comes through them, gentle and unafraid; there is no disorder in her raiment.*)

HELEN
King Menelaus, thy first deed might make
A woman fear. Into my chamber brake
Thine armèd men, and lead me wrathfully.
Methinks, almost, I know thou hatest me.
Yet I would ask thee, what decree is gone
Forth for my life or death?

MENELAUS (*struggling with his emotion*)
There was not one
That scrupled for thee. All, all with one will
Gave thee to me, whom thou hast wronged, to kill!

HELEN
And is it granted that I speak, or no,
In answer to them ere I die, to show
I die most wronged and innocent?

MENELAUS
I seek
To kill thee, woman; not to hear thee speak!

HECUBA
O hear her! She must never die unheard,
King Menelaus! And give me the word
To speak in answer! All the wrong she wrought
Away from thee, in Troy, thou knowest not.

The whole tale set together is a death
Too sure; she shall not 'scape thee!

MENELAUS

'Tis but breath
And time. For thy sake, Hecuba, if she need
To speak, I grant the prayer. I have no heed
Nor mercy—let her know it well—for her!

HELEN

It may be that, how false or true soe'er
Thou deem me, I shall win no word from thee.
So sore thou holdest me thine enemy.
Yet I will take what words I think thy heart
Holdeth of anger: and in even part
Set my wrong and thy wrong, and all that fell.
(*pointing to* HECUBA)
She cometh first, who bare the seed and well
Of springing sorrow, when to life she brought
Paris: and that old King, who quenchèd not
Quick in the spark, ere yet he woke to slay,
The firebrand's image.[10]—But enough: a day
Came, and this Paris judged beneath the trees
Three Crowns of Life, three diverse Goddesses.
The gift of Pallas was of War, to lead
His East in conquering battles, and make bleed
The hearths of Hellas. Hera held a Throne—
If majesties he craved—to reign alone
From Phrygia to the last realm of the West.
And Cypris, if he deemed her loveliest,
Beyond all heaven, made dreams about my face
And for her grace gave me. And, lo! her grace
Was judged the fairest, and she stood above
Those twain.—Thus was I loved, and thus my love
Hath holpen Hellas. No fierce Eastern crown
Is o'er your lands, no spear hath cast them down.
O, it was well for Hellas! But for me
Most ill; caught up and sold across the sea
For this my beauty; yea, dishonourèd
For that which else had been about my head
A crown of honour. . . . Ah, I see thy thought;
The first plain deed, 'tis that I answer not,
How in the dark out of thy house I fled . . .
There came the Seed of Fire, this woman's seed;

Came—O, a Goddess great walked with him then—
This Alexander, Breaker-down-of-Men,
This Paris, Strength-is-with-him; whom thou, whom—
O false and light of heart—thou in thy room
Didst leave, and spreadest sail for Cretan seas,
Far, far from me! . . . And yet, how strange it is!
I ask not thee; I ask my own sad thought,
What was there in my heart, that I forgot
My home and land and all I loved, to fly
With a strange man? Surely it was not I,
But Cypris, there! Lay thou thy rod on her,
And be more high than Zeus and bitterer,
Who o'er all other spirits hath his throne,
But knows her chain must bind him. My wrong done
Hath its own pardon. . . .
One word yet thou hast,
Methink, of righteous seeming. When at last
The earth for Paris oped and all was o'er,
And her strange magic bound my feet no more,
Why kept I still his house, why fled not I
To the Argive ships? . . . Ah, how I strove to fly!
The old Gate-Warden could have told thee all,
My husband, and the watchers from the wall;
It was not once they took me, with the rope
Tied, and this body swung in the air, to grope
Its way toward thee, from that dim battlement.
Ah, husband still, how shall thy hand be bent
To slay me? Nay, if Right be come at last,
What shalt thou bring but comfort for pains past,
And harbour for a woman storm-driven:
A woman borne away by violent men:
And this one birthright of my beauty, this
That might have been my glory, lo, it is
A stamp that God hath burned, of slavery!
Alas! and if thou cravest still to be
As one set above gods, inviolate,
'Tis but a fruitless longing holds thee yet.

LEADER

O Queen, think of thy children and thy land,
And break her spell! The sweet soft speech, the hand
And heart so fell: it maketh me afraid.

HECUBA

Meseems her goddesses first cry mine aid
Against these lying lips! . . . Not Hera, nay,
Nor virgin Pallas deem I such low clay,
To barter their own folk, Argos and brave
Athens, to be trod down, the Phrygian's slave,
All for vain glory and a shepherd's prize
On Ida! Wherefore should great Hera's eyes
So hunger to be fair? She doth not use
To seek for other loves, being wed with Zeus.
And maiden Pallas . . . did some strange god's face
Beguile her, that she craved for loveliness,
Who chose from God one virgin gift above
All gifts, and fleëth from the lips of love?
  Ah, deck not out thine own heart's evil springs
By making spirits of heaven as brutish things
And cruel. The wise may hear thee, and guess all!
  And Cypris must take ship—fantastical!
Sail with my son and enter at the gate
To seek thee! Had she willed it, she had sate
At peace in heaven, and wafted thee, and all
Amyclae with thee, under Ilion's wall
  My son was passing beautiful, beyond
His peers; and thine own heart, that saw and conned
His face, became a spirit enchanting thee.
For all wild things that in mortality
Have being, are Aphrodite; and the name
She bears in heaven is born and writ of them.
  Thou sawest him in gold and orient vest
Shining, and lo, a fire about thy breast
Leapt! Thou hadst fed upon such little things,
Pacing thy ways in Argos. But now wings
Were come! Once free from Sparta, and there rolled
The Ilian glory, like broad streams of gold,
To steep thine arms and splash the towers! How small,
How cold that day was Menelaus' hall!
  Enough of that. It was by force my son
Took thee, thou sayst, and striving. . . . Yet not one
In Sparta knew! No cry, no sudden prayer
Rang from thy rooms that night. . . . Castor was there
To hear thee, and his brother: both true men,
Not yet among the stars! And after, when
Thou camest here to Troy, and in thy track

Argos and all its anguish and the rack
Of war—Ah God!—perchance men told thee 'Now
The Greek prevails in battle': then wouldst thou
Praise Menelaus, that my son might smart,
Striving with that old image in a heart
Uncertain still. Then Troy had victories:
And this Greek was as naught! Alway thine eyes
Watched Fortune's eyes, to follow hot where she
Led first. Thou wouldst not follow Honesty.
Thy secret ropes, thy body swung to fall
Far, like a desperate prisoner, from the wall!
Who found thee so? When wast thou taken? Nay,
Hadst thou no surer rope, no sudden way
Of the sword, that any woman honest-souled
Had sought long since, loving her lord of old?
Often and often did I charge thee; 'Go,
My daughter; go thy ways. My sons will know
New loves. I will give aid, and steal thee past
The Argive watch. O give us peace at last,
Us and our foes!' But out thy spirit cried
As at a bitter word. Thou hadst thy pride
In Alexander's house, and O, 'twas sweet
To hold proud Easterns bowing at thy feet.
They were great things to thee! . . . And comest thou now
Forth, and hast decked thy bosom and thy brow,
And breathest with thy lord the same blue air,
Thou evil heart? Low, low, with ravaged hair,
Rent raiment, and flesh shuddering, and within—
O shame at last, not glory for thy sin;
So face him if thou canst! . . . Lo, I have done.
Be true, O King; let Hellas bear her crown
Of Justice. Slay this woman, and upraise
The law for evermore: she that betrays
Her husband's bed, let her be judged and die.

LEADER

Be strong, O King; give judgment worthily
For thee and thy great house. Shake off thy long
Reproach; not weak, but iron against the wrong!

MENELAUS

Thy thought doth walk with mine in one intent.
'Tis sure; her heart was willing, when she went

Forth to a stranger's bed. And all her fair
Tale of enchantment, 'tis a thing of air! . . .
(*Turning furiously upon* HELEN)
Out woman! There be those that seek thee yet
With stones! Go, meet them. So shall thy long debt
Be paid at last. And ere this night is o'er
Thy dead face shall dishonour me no more!

HELEN (*kneeling before him and embracing him*)
Behold, mine arms are wreathed about thy knees;
Lay not upon my head the phantasies
Of Heaven. Remember all, and slay me not!

HECUBA
Remember them she murdered, them that fought
Beside thee, and their children! Hear that prayer!

MENELAUS
Peace, agèd woman, peace! 'Tis not for her;
She is as naught to me.
(*To the Soldiers*) . . . March on before,
Ye ministers, and tend her to the shore . . .
And have some chambered galley set for her,
Where she may sail the seas.

HECUBA
If thou be there,
I charge thee, let not her set foot therein!

MENELAUS
How? Shall the ship go heavier for her sin?

HECUBA
A lover once, will always love again.

MENELAUS
If that he loved be evil, he will fain
Hate it! . . . Howbeit, thy pleasure shall be done.
Some other ship shall bear her, not mine own. . . .
Thou counsellest very well . . . And when we come
To Argos, then . . . O then some pitiless doom
Well-earned, black as her heart! One that shall bind
Once for all time the law on womankind
Of faithfulness! . . . 'Twill be no easy thing,
God knoweth. But the thought thereof shall fling

A chill on the dreams of women, though they be
Wilder of wing and loathèd more than she!
(*Exit, following* HELEN, *who is escorted by the Soldiers.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Some Women

strophe 1

And hast thou turned from the Altar of frankincense,
And given to the Greek thy temple of Ilion?
The flame of the cakes of corn, is it gone from hence,
The myrrh on the air and the wreathèd towers gone?
And Ida, dark Ida, where the wild ivy grows,
The glens that run as rivers from the summer-broken snows,
And the Rock, is it forgotten, where the first sunbeam glows,
The lit house most holy of the Dawn?

Others

antistrophe 1

The sacrifice is gone and the sound of joy,
The dancing under the stars and the night-long prayer:
The Golden Images and the Moons of Troy,
The twelve Moons and the mighty names they bear:
My heart, my heart crieth, O Lord Zeus on high,
Were they all to thee as nothing, thou thronèd in the sky,
Thronèd in the fire-cloud, where a City, near to die,
Passeth in the wind and the flare?

A Woman

strophe 2

Dear one, O husband mine,
Thou in the dim dominions
Driftest with waterless lips,
Unburied; and me the ships
Shall bear o'er the bitter brine,
Storm-birds upon angry pinions,
Where the towers of the Giants shine
O'er Argos cloudily,
And the riders ride by the sea.

Others

And children still in the Gate
Crowd and cry,
A multitude desolate,
Voices that float and wait

As the tears run dry:
'Mother, alone on the shore
They drive me, far from thee:
Lo, the dip of the oar,
The black hull on the sea!
Is it the Isle Immortal,
Salamis, waits for me?
Is it the Rock that broods
Over the sundered floods
Of Corinth, the ancient portal
Of Pelops' sovranty?'

A Woman

antistrophe 2

Out in the waste of foam,
Where rideth dark Menelaus,
Come to us there, O white
And jagged, with wild sea-light
And crashing of oar-blades, come,
O thunder of God, and slay us:
While our tears are wet for home,
While out in the storm go we,
Slaves of our enemy!

Others

And, God, may Helen be there,
With mirror of gold,
Decking her face so fair,
Girl-like; and hear, and stare,
And turn death-cold:
Never, ah, never more
The hearth of her home to see,
Nor sand of the Spartan shore,
Nor tombs where her fathers be,
Nor Athena's bronzen Dwelling,
Nor the towers of Pitane;
For her face was a dark desire
Upon Greece, and shame like fire,
And her dead are welling, welling,
From red Simois to the sea!

(TALTHYBIUS, *followed by one or two Soldiers and bearing the child* ASTYANAX *dead, is seen approaching.*)

LEADER

Ah, change on change! Yet each one racks
This land with evil manifold;
Unhappy wives of Troy, behold,
They bear the dead Astyanax,
Our prince, whom bitter Greeks this hour
Have hurled to death from Ilion's tower.

TALTHYBIUS

One galley, Hecuba, there lingereth yet,
Lapping the wave, to gather the last freight
Of Pyrrhus' spoils for Thessaly. The chief
Himself long since hath parted, much in grief
For Peleus' sake, his grandsire, whom, men say,
Acastus, Pelias' son, in war array
Hath driven to exile. Loath enough before
Was he to linger, and now goes the more
In haste, bearing Andromache, his prize.
'Tis she hath charmed these tears into mine eyes,
Weeping her fatherland, as o'er the wave
She gazed, and speaking words to Hector's grave.
Howbeit, she prayed us that due rites be done
For burial of this babe, thine Hector's son,
That now from Ilion's tower is fallen and dead.
And, lo! this great bronze-fronted shield, the dread
Of many a Greek, that Hector held in fray,
O never in God's name—so did she pray—
Be this borne forth to hang in Peleus' hall
Or that dark bridal chamber, that the wall
May hurt her eyes; but here, in Troy o'erthrown,
Instead of cedar wood and vaulted stone,
Be this her child's last house. . . . And in thine hands
She bade me lay him, to be swathed in bands
Of death and garments, such as rest to thee
In these thy fallen fortunes; seeing that she
Hath gone her ways, and, for her master's haste,
May no more fold the babe unto his rest.
Howbeit, so soon as he is garlanded
And robed, we will heap earth above his head
And lift our sails. . . . See all be swiftly done,
As thou art bidden. I have saved thee one
Labour. For as I passed Scamander's stream
Hard by, I let the waters run on him,

And cleansed his wounds.—See, I will go forth now
And break the hard earth for his grave: so thou
And I will haste together, to set free
Our oars at last to beat the homeward sea!
(*He goes out with his Soldiers, leaving the body of the Child in* HECUBA'S *arms.*)

HECUBA

Set the great orb of Hector's shield to lie
Here on the ground. 'Tis bitter that mine eye
Should see it. . . . O ye Argives, was your spear
Keen, and your hearts so low and cold, to fear
This babe? 'Twas a strange murder for brave men!
For fear this babe some day might raise again
His fallen land! Had ye so little pride?
While Hector fought, and thousands at his side,
Ye smote us, and we perished; and now, now,
When all are dead and Ilion lieth low,
Ye dread this innocent! I deem it not
Wisdom, that rage of fear that hath no thought. . . .
Ah, what a death hath found thee, little one!
Hadst thou but fallen fighting, hadst thou known
Strong youth and love and all the majesty
Of godlike kings, then had we spoken of thee
As of one blessèd . . . could in any wise
These days know blessedness. But now thine eyes
Have seen, thy lips have tasted, but thy soul
No knowledge had nor usage of the whole
Rich life that lapt thee round. . . . Poor little child!
Was it our ancient wall, the circuit piled
By loving Gods, so savagely hath rent
Thy curls, these little flowers innocent
That were thy mother's garden, where she laid
Her kisses; here, just where the bone-edge frayed
Grins white above—Ah heaven, I will not see!
Ye tender arms, the same dear mould have ye
As his; how from the shoulder loose ye drop
And weak! And dear proud lips, so full of hope
And closed for ever! What false words ye said
At daybreak, when he crept into my bed,
Called me kind names, and promised: 'Grandmother,
When thou art dead, I will cut close my hair
And lead out all the captains to ride by

Thy tomb.' Why didst thou cheat me so? 'Tis I,
Old, homeless, childless, that for thee must shed
Cold tears, so young, so miserably dead.
Dear God, the pattering welcomes of thy feet,
The nursing in my lap; and O, the sweet
Falling asleep together! All is gone.
How should a poet carve the funeral stone
To tell thy story true? 'There lieth here
A babe whom the Greeks feared, and in their fear
Slew him.' Aye, Greece will bless the tale it tells!
Child, they have left thee beggared of all else
In Hector's house; but one thing shalt thou keep,
This war-shield bronzen-barred, wherein to sleep.
Alas, thou guardian true of Hector's fair
Left arm, how art thou masterless! And there
I see his handgrip printed on thy hold;
And deep stains of the precious sweat, that rolled
In battle from the brows and beard of him,
Drop after drop, are writ about thy rim.
Go, bring them—such poor garments hazardous
As these days leave. God hath not granted us
Wherewith to make much pride. But all I can,
I give thee, Child of Troy.—O vain is man,
Who glorieth in his joy and hath no fears:
While to and fro the chances of the years
Dance like an idiot in the wind! And none
By any strength hath his own fortune won.
(*During these lines several Women are seen approaching with garlands and raiment in their hands.*)

LEADER

Lo these, who bear thee raiment harvested
From Ilion's slain, to fold upon the dead.
(*During the following scene* HECUBA *gradually takes the garments and wraps them about the Child.*)

HECUBA

O not in pride for speeding of the car
Beyond thy peers, not for the shaft of war
True aimed, as Phrygians use; not any prize
Of joy for thee, nor splendour in men's eyes,
Thy father's mother lays these offerings
About thee, from the many fragrant things
That were all thine of old. But now no more.

One woman, loathed of God, hath broke the door
And robbed thy treasure-house, and thy warm breath
Made cold, and trod thy people down to death!

CHORUS

Some Women

Deep in the heart of me
I feel thine hand,
Mother: and is it he
Dead here, our prince to be,
And lord of the land?

HECUBA

Glory of Phrygian raiment, which my thought
Kept for thy bridal day with some far-sought
Queen of the East, folds thee for evermore.
And thou, grey Mother, Mother-Shield that bore

A thousand days of glory, thy last crown
Is here. . . . Dear Hector's shield! Thou shalt lie down
Undying with the dead, and lordlier there
Than all the gold Odysseus' breast can bear,
The evil and the strong!

CHORUS

Some Women

Child of the Shield-bearer,
Alas, Hector's child!
Great Earth, the All-mother,
Taketh thee unto her
With wailing wild!

Others

Mother of misery,
Give Death his song!

HECUBA

(Woe!)

Others

Aye and bitterly

HECUBA

(Woe!)

Others

We too weep for thee,
And the infinite wrong!
(*During these lines* HECUBA, *kneeling by the body, has been performing a funeral rite, symbolically staunching the dead Child's wounds.*)

HECUBA

I make thee whole;
I bind thy wounds, O little vanished soul.
This wound and this I heal with linen white:
O emptiness of aid! . . . Yet let the rite
Be spoken. This and . . . Nay, not I, but he,
Thy father far away shall comfort thee!
(*She bows her head to the ground and remains motionless and unseeing.*)

CHORUS

Beat, beat thine head:
Beat with the wailing chime
Of hands lifted in time:
Beat and bleed for the dead.
Woe is me for the dead!

HECUBA

O Women! Ye, mine own . . .
(*She rises bewildered, as though she had seen a vision.*)

LEADER

Hecuba, speak!
Thine are we all. Oh, ere thy bosom break . . .

HECUBA

Lo, I have seen the open hand of God;
And in it nothing, nothing, save the rod
Of mine affliction, and the eternal hate,
Beyond all lands, chosen and lifted great
For Troy! Vain, vain were prayer and incense-swell
And bulls' blood on the altars! . . . All is well.
Had He not turned us in His hand, and thrust
Our high things low and shook our hills as dust,
We had not been this splendour, and our wrong
An everlasting music for the song

Of earth and heaven!
Go, women: lay our dead
In his low sepulchre. He hath his meed
Of robing. And, methinks, but little care
Toucheth the tomb, if they that moulder there
Have rich encerement. 'Tis we, 'tis we,
That dream, we living and our vanity!
(*The Women bear out the dead Child upon the shield, singing, when presently flames of fire and dim forms are seen among the ruins of the City.*)

CHORUS

Some Women

Woe for the mother that bare thee, child,
Thread so frail of a hope so high,
That Time hath broken: and all men smiled
About thy cradle, and, passing by,
Spoke of thy father's majesty.
Low, low, thou liest!

Others

Ha! Who be these on the crested rock?
Fiery hands in the dusk, and a shock
Of torches flung! What lingereth still,
O wounded City, of unknown ill,
Ere yet thou diest?

TALTHYBIUS (*coming out through the ruined wall*)

Ye Captains that have charge to wreck this keep
Of Priam's City, let your torches sleep
No more! Up, fling the fire into her heart!
Then have we done with Ilion, and may part
In joy to Hellas from this evil land.
And ye—so hath one word two faces—stand,
Daughters of Troy, till on your ruined wall
The echo of my master's trumpet call
In signal breaks: then, forward to the sea,
Where the long ships lie waiting.
And for thee,
O ancient woman most unfortunate,
Follow: Odysseus' men be here, and wait
To guide thee. . . . 'Tis to him thou go'st for thrall.

HECUBA

Ah, me! and is it come, the end of all,
The very crest and summit of my days?
I go forth from my land, and all its ways
Are filled with fire! Bear me, O aged feet,
A little nearer: I must gaze, and greet
My poor town ere she fall.
Farewell, farewell!
O thou whose breath was mighty on the swell
Of orient winds, my Troy! Even thy name
Shall soon be taken from thee. Lo, the flame
Hath thee, and we, thy children, pass away
To slavery . . . God! O God of mercy! . . . Nay:
Why call I on the Gods? They know, they know,
My prayers, and would not hear them long ago.
Quick, to the flames! O, in thine agony,
My Troy, mine own, take me to die with thee!
(*She springs toward the flames, but is seized and held by the Soldiers.*)

TALTHYBIUS

Back! Thou art drunken with thy miseries,
Poor woman!—Hold her fast, men, till it please
Odysseus that she come. She was his lot
Chosen from all and portioned. Lose her not!
(*He goes to watch over the burning of the City. The dusk deepens.*)

CHORUS

Divers Women

Woe, woe, woe!
Thou of the Ages, O wherefore fleëst thou,
Lord of the Phrygian, Father that made us?
'Tis we, thy children; shall no man aid us?
'Tis we, thy children! Seëst thou, seëst thou?

Others

He seëth, only his heart is pitiless;
And the land dies: yea, she,
She of the Mighty Cities perisheth citiless!
Troy shall no more be!

Others

Woe, woe, woe!
Ilion shineth afar!
Fire in the deeps thereof,
Fire in the heights above,
And crested walls of War!

Others

As smoke on the wing of heaven
Climbeth and scattereth,
Torn of the spear and driven,
The land crieth for death:
O stormy battlements that red fire hath riven,
And the sword's angry breath!

(*A new thought comes to* HECUBA; *she kneels and beats the earth with her hands.*)

HECUBA

strophe

O Earth, Earth of my children; hearken! and O mine own,
Ye have hearts and forget not, ye in the darkness lying!

LEADER

Now hast thou found thy prayer, crying to them that are gone.

HECUBA

Surely my knees are weary, but I kneel above your head;
Hearken, O ye so silent! My hands beat your bed!

LEADER

I, I am near thee;
I kneel to thy dead to hear thee,
Kneel to mine own in the darkness; O husband, hear my crying!

HECUBA

Even as the beasts they drive, even as the loads they bear,

LEADER

(Pain; O pain!)

HECUBA

We go to the house of bondage. Hear, ye dead, O hear!

LEADER

(Go, and come not again!)

HECUBA

Priam, mine own Priam,
Lying so lowly,
Thou in thy nothingness,
Shelterless, comfortless,
See'st thou the thing I am?
Know'st thou my bitter stress?

LEADER

Nay, thou art naught to him!
Out of the strife there came,
Out of the noise and shame,
Making his eyelids dim,
Death, the Most Holy!
(*The fire and smoke rise constantly higher.*)

HECUBA

antistrophe

O high houses of Gods, belovèd streets of my birth,
Ye have found the way of the sword, the fiery and blood-red river!

LEADER

Fall, and men shall forget you! Ye shall lie in the gentle earth.

HECUBA

The dust as smoke riseth; it spreadeth wide its wing;
It maketh me as a shadow, and my City a vanished thing!

LEADER

Out on the smoke she goeth,
And her name no man knoweth;
And the cloud is northward, southward; Troy is gone for ever!
(*A great crash is heard, and the Wall is lost in smoke and darkness.*)

HECUBA

Ha! Marked ye? Heard ye? The crash of the towers that fall!

LEADER

All is gone!

HECUBA

Wrath in the earth and quaking and a flood that sweepeth all,

LEADER

And passeth on!

(*The Greek trumpet sounds.*)

HECUBA

Farewell!—O spirit grey,
Whatso is coming,
Fail not from under me.
Weak limbs, why tremble ye?
Forth where the new long day
Dawneth to slavery!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Farewell from parting lips,
Farewell!—Come, I and thou,
Whatso may wait us now,
Forth to the long Greek ships
And the sea's foaming.

(*The trumpet sounds again, and the Women go out in the darkness.*)

1. The lesser Ajax, son of Oileus, as Murray points out in his note to these lines, ravished or attempted to ravish Cassandra while she was clinging to the image of Pallas. This was one of the sins perpetrated during the capture of Troy which, according to the legend, brought down the anger of the gods upon the Greeks.

2. Cassandra had in her charge the sacred keys of the god's "Holy Place," as Murray calls it.

3. Cassandra here foresees the doom of the house of Atreus.

4. *i.e.,* the three Erinyes or Furies.

5. This thought, traditionally supposed to have been first expressed by Solon, appears frequently in Greek tragedy. Cf., *e.g.,* the last lines of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King.*

6. *i.e.,* Athena.

7. Murray's note to this passage reads: "This very beautiful scene is perhaps marred to most modern readers by an element which is merely a part of the convention of ancient mourning. Each of the mourners cries, 'There is no affliction like mine!' and then proceeds to argue, as it were, against the other's counter claim. One can only say that it was, after all, what they expected of each other; and I believe the same convention exists in most places where keening or wailing is an actual practice."

8. Murray supplies here some words which seem to be missing in the Greek.

9. Murray prints in his notes the following argument of this lyric: "This is not the first time Troy has been taken. Long ago Heracles made war against the old king Láomedon, because he had not given him the immortal steeds that he promised. And Telamon joined him; Telamon who might have been happy in his island of Salamis, among the bees and the pleasant waters, looking over the strait to the olive-laden hills of Athens, the beloved City. And they took ship and slew Laomedon. Yea, twice Zeus has destroyed Ilion.

"(Second part) Is it all in vain that our Trojan princes have been loved by the Gods? Ganymedes pours the nectar of Zeus in his banquets, his face never troubled, though his motherland is burned with fire. And, to

say nothing of Zeus, how can the Goddess of Morning rise and shine upon us uncaring? She loved Tithonus, son of Laomedon, and bore him up from us in a chariot to be her husband in the skies. But all that once made them love us is gone."

10. Murray's note here reads: "Hecuba, just before Paris' birth, dreamed that she gave birth to a firebrand. The prophets therefore advised that the babe should be killed; but Priam disobeyed them."

IX
HERACLES

Characters in the Play

Amphitryon, *husband of Alcmena, the mother of* Heracles
Megara, *wife of* Heracles, *daughter of Creon*
Lycus, *unlawful King of Thebes*
Iris
Madness
Messenger
Heracles, *son of Zeus and Alcmena*
Theseus, *King of Athens*
Chorus of Old Men of Thebes
Sons of Heracles, *guards, attendants*

INTRODUCTION

SCHOLARS have been completely unable to determine the date of the *Heracles*. Euripides has chosen a version of the legend which connects Heracles and Theseus, and explains in some measure why their worship was combined in a number of Attic cults. This circumstance would point to a date somewhere in the neighbourhood of 420 B.C., since in the play Heracles' connection with Athens seems to be exploited in order to reflect greater glory upon the city and her claims to supremacy. It therefore seems natural to suppose that Euripides wrote his play prior to the period during which he gradually lost his faith in Athens. On the other hand there have been some who believe that the piece was composed late in the poet's life. This theory is based largely upon the famous chorus on old age (lines 637–700), which seems to bespeak authorship by a person advanced in years. As a matter of fact, there have been critics who have even seen in the *Heracles* a close counterpart to Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus,* with which the play has been compared. When one examines the conflicting claims of these two theories, it becomes immediately evident why the problem of the play's date has never been satisfactorily settled.

As has already been indicated, the legends of Heracles took several different forms. Euripides did not choose to follow the version which Sophocles adopted for *The Trachiniae,* but rather took over the so-called Theban account, which is somewhat less romantic. The prologue of the play, spoken by Amphitryon, the reputed father of Heracles, gives in great detail all the requisite information concerning the events prior to the dramatic action. There is presented a rather exhaustive account of the genealogical situation and then we are told that Heracles has not yet returned from his last and most difficult labour, his mission to Hades to bring back Cerberus. We learn likewise that in Heracles' absence a certain Lycus has usurped the royal power of Thebes, and is now on the point of slaying Amphitryon, Heracles' wife Megara, and the hero's children. The play records how Heracles returned, rescued his family, slew Lycus, but then was visited with a dread madness and in his frenzy slew likewise his wife and children.

The *Heracles* shares with several other Euripidean tragedies the characteristic of falling into two parts which are somewhat inadequately knit together. In this play the fault does not seem to be so glaring, because the character of Heracles dominates the entire drama, giving it at least a modicum of unity. Certainly the contrast between Heracles' triumph and his cataclysmic downfall, which immediately follows, intensifies to the extreme the impact of the play. Furthermore, the *Heracles* becomes more unified because of the stress laid upon the religious implications of the dramatic situation. Though unmitigated in his hatred for Hera, Heracles at the end of the play seems to have reached a somewhat purified religious position. He does not commit suicide, for he feels that to be a coward's course. Influenced by the counsels of Theseus, he determines to live on, courageously to endure the blows of fate, and to face fully the responsibility for his deeds. He makes this decision after having contemptuously rejected the anthropomorphism in the conventional religion, while at the same time he maintains, so far as we can tell, a belief in a higher, better deity behind the universe, inscrutable in his ways to man, but who has decreed that it is the part of a man to endure life. When Euripides presents Heracles in these terms, he completes his portrait of a great tragic character.

HERACLES

(SCENE:—*Before the palace of* HERACLES *at Thebes. Nearby stands the altar of Zeus, on the steps of which are now seated* AMPHITRYON, MEGARA *and her sons by* HERACLES. *They are seeking refuge at the altar.*)

AMPHITRYON

WHAT mortal hath not heard of him who shared a wife with Zeus, Amphitryon of Argos, whom on a day Alcaeus, son of Perseus, begat, Amphitryon the father of Heracles? He it was dwelt here in Thebes, where from the sowing of the dragon's teeth grew up a crop of earth-born giants; for of these Ares saved a scanty band, and their children's children people the city of Cadmus. Hence sprung Creon, son of Menoeceus, king of this land; and Creon became the father of this lady Megara, whom once all Cadmus' race escorted with the glad music of lutes at her wedding, in the day that Heracles, illustrious chief, led her to my halls. Now he, my son, left Thebes where I was settled, left his wife Megara and her kin, eager to make his home in Argolis, in that walled town which the Cyclopes built, whence I am exiled for the slaying of Electryon; so he, wishing to lighten my affliction and to find a home in his own land, did offer Eurystheus a mighty price for my recall, even to free the world of savage monsters, whether it was that Hera goaded him to submit to this, or that fate was leagued against him. Divers are the toils he hath accomplished, and last of all hath he passed through the mouth of Taenarus into the halls of Hades to drag to the light that hound with bodies three, and thence is he never returned. Now there is an ancient legend amongst the race of Cadmus, that one Lycus in days gone by was husband to Dirce, being king of this city with its seven towers, before that Amphion and Zethus, sons of Zeus, lords of the milk-white steeds, became rulers in the land. His son, called by the same name as his father, albeit no Theban but a stranger from Euboea, slew Creon, and after that seized the government, having fallen on this city when weakened by dissension. So this connection with Creon is likely to prove to us a serious evil; for now that my son is in the bowels of the earth, this illustrious monarch Lycus is bent on extirpating the children of Heracles, to quench one bloody feud with

another, likewise his wife and me, if useless age like mine is to rank amongst men, that the boys may never grow up to exact a blood-penalty of their uncle's family. So I, left here by my son, whilst he is gone into the pitchy darkness of the earth, to tend and guard his children in his house, am taking my place with their mother, that the race of Heracles may not perish, here at the altar of Zeus the Saviour, which my own gallant child set up to commemorate his glorious victory over the Minyae. And here we are careful to keep our station, though in need of everything, of food, of drink, and raiment, huddled together on the hard bare ground; for we are barred out from our house and sit here for want of any other safety. As for friends, some I see are insincere; while others, who are staunch, have no power to help us further. This is what misfortune means to man; God grant it may never fall to the lot of any who bears the least goodwill to me, to apply this never-failing test of friendship!

MEGARA

Old warrior, who erst did raze the citadel of the Taphians leading on the troops of Thebes to glory, how uncertain are God's dealings with man! For I, as far as concerned my sire was never an outcast of fortune, for he was once accounted a man of might by reason of his wealth, possessed as he was of royal power, for which long spears are launched at the lives of the fortunate through love of it; children too he had; and me did he betroth to thy son, matching me in glorious marriage with Heracles. Whereas now all that is dead and gone from us; and I and thou, old friend, art doomed to die, and these children of Heracles, whom I am guarding 'neath my wing as a bird keepeth her tender chicks under her. And they the while in turn keep asking me, "Mother, whither is our father gone from the land? what is he about? when will he return?" Thus they inquire for their father, in childish perplexity; while I put them off with excuses, inventing stories; but still I wonder if 'tis he whenever a door creaks on its hinges, and up they all start, thinking to embrace their father's knees. What hope or way of salvation art thou now devising, old friend? for to thee I look. We can never steal beyond the boundaries of the land unseen, for there is too strict a watch set on us at every outlet, nor have we any longer hopes of safety in our friends. Whatever thy scheme is, declare it, lest our death be made ready, while we are only prolonging the time, powerless to escape.

AMPHITRYON

'Tis by no means easy, my daughter, to give one's earnest advice on such matters easily, without weary thought.

MEGARA

Dost need a further taste of grief, or cling so fast to life?

AMPHITRYON

Yes, I love this life, and cling to its hopes.

MEGARA

So do I; but it boots not to expect the unexpected, old friend.

AMPHITRYON

In these delays is left the only cure for our evils.

MEGARA

'Tis the pain of that interval I feel so.

AMPHITRYON

Daughter, there may yet be a happy escape from present troubles for me and thee; my son, thy husband, may yet arrive. So calm thyself, and wipe those tears from thy children's eyes, and soothe them with soft words, inventing a tale to delude them, piteous though such fraud be. Yea, for men's misfortunes ofttimes flag, and the stormy wind doth not always blow so strong, nor are the prosperous ever so; for all things change, making way for each other. The bravest man is he who relieth ever on his hopes, but despair is the mark of a coward.

(*The* CHORUS OF OLD MEN OF THEBES *enters.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

strophe

To the sheltering roof, to the old man's couch, leaning on my staff have I set forth, chanting a plaintive dirge like some bird grown grey, I that am but a voice and nothing more, a fancy bred of the visions of sleep by night, palsied with age, yet meaning kindly. All hail! ye orphaned babes! all hail, old friend! thou too, unhappy mother, wailing for thy husband in the halls of Hades!

antistrophe

Faint not too soon upon your way, nor let your limbs grow weary, even as a colt beneath the yoke grows weary as he mounts some stony hill, dragging the weight of a wheeled car. Take hold of hand or robe, whoso feels his footsteps falter. Old friend, escort another like thyself, who erst amid his toiling peers in the days of our youth would take his place beside thee, no blot upon his country's glorious record.

See, how like their father's sternly flash these children's eyes! Misfortune, God wot, hath not failed his children, nor yet hath his comeliness been denied them. O Hellas! if thou lose these, of what allies wilt thou rob thyself!

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

But I see Lycus, the ruler of this land, drawing near the house.

(LYCUS *and his attendants enter.*)

LYCUS

One question, if I may, to this father of Heracles and his wife; and certainly as your lord and master I have a right to put what questions I choose. How long do ye seek to prolong your lives? What hope, what succour do ye see to save you from death? Do you trust that these children's father, who lies dead in the halls of Hades, will return? How unworthily ye show your sorrow at having to die, thou (*to* AMPHITRYON) after thy idle boasts, scattered broadcast through Hellas, that Zeus was partner in thy marriage-bed and there begat a new god; and thou (*to* MEGARA) after calling thyself the wife of so peerless a lord.

After all, what was the fine exploit thy husband achieved, if he *did* kill a hydra in a marsh or that monster of Nemea? which he caught in a snare, for all he says he strangled it to death in his arms. Are these your weapons for the hard struggle? Is it for this then that Heracles' children should be spared? a man who has won a reputation for valour in his contests with beasts, in all else a weakling; who ne'er buckled shield to arm nor faced the spear, but with a bow, that coward's weapon, was ever ready to run away. Archery is no test of manly bravery; no! he *is* a man who keeps his post in the ranks and steadily faces the swift wound the spear may plough. My policy, again, old man, shows no reckless cruelty, but caution; for I am well aware I slew Creon, the father of Megara, and am in possession of his throne. So I have no wish that these children should grow up and be left to take vengeance on me in requital for what I have done.

AMPHITRYON

As for Zeus, let Zeus defend his son's case; but as for me, Heracles, I am only anxious on thy behalf to prove by what I say this tyrant's ignorance; for I cannot allow thee to be ill spoken of. First then for that which should never have been said,—for to speak of thee Heracles as a coward is, methinks, outside the pale of speech,—of that must I clear thee with heaven to witness. I appeal then to the thunder of Zeus, and the chariot wherein he rode, when he pierced the giants, earth's brood, to the heart with his winged shafts, and with gods uplifted the glorious triumph-song; or go to Pholoe and ask the insolent tribe of four-legged Centaurs, thou craven king, ask them who they would judge their bravest foe; will they not say my son, who according to thee is but a pretender? Wert thou to ask Euboean Dirphys, thy native place, it would nowise sing thy praise, for thou hast never done a single gallant deed to which thy country can witness. Next thou dost disparage that clever invention, an archer's

weapon; come, listen to me and learn wisdom. A man who fights in line is a slave to his weapons, and if his fellow-comrades want for courage he is slain himself through the cowardice of his neighbours, or, if he break his spear, he has not wherewithal to defend his body from death, having only one means of defence; whereas all who are armed with the trusty bow, though they have but one weapon, yet is it the best; for a man, after discharging countless arrows, still has others wherewith to defend himself from death, and standing at a distance keeps off the enemy, wounding them for all their watchfulness with shafts invisible, and never exposing himself to the foe, but keeping under cover; and this is far the wisest course in battle, to harm the enemy, if they are not stationed out of shot, and keep safe oneself. These arguments are completely opposite to thine with regard to the point at issue. Next, why art thou desirous of slaying these children? What have they done to thee? One piece of wisdom I credit thee with, thy coward terror of a brave man's descendants. Still it is hard on us, if for thy cowardice we must die; a fate that ought to have overtaken thee at our braver hands, if Zeus had been fairly disposed towards us. But, if thou art so anxious to make thyself supreme in the land, let us at least go into exile; abstain from all violence, else thou wilt suffer by it whenso the deity causes fortune's breeze to veer round.

Ah! thou land of Cadmus,—for to thee too will I turn, upbraiding thee with words of reproach,—is this your succour of Heracles and his children? the man who faced alone the Minyan host in battle and allowed Thebes to see the light with freemen's eyes. I cannot praise Hellas, nor will I ever keep silence, finding her so craven as regards my son; she should have come with fire and sword and warrior's arms to help these tender babes, to requite him for all his labours in purging land and sea. Such help, my children, neither Hellas nor the city of Thebes affords you; to me a feeble friend ye look, that am but empty sound and nothing more. For the vigour which once I had, is gone from me; my limbs are palsied with age, and my strength is decayed. Were I but young and still a man of my hands, I would have seized my spear and dabbled those flaxen locks of his with blood, so that the coward would now be flying from my prowess beyond the bounds of Atlas.

LEADER

Have not the brave amongst mankind a fair opening for speech, albeit slow to begin?

LYCUS

Say what thou wilt of me in thy exalted phrase, but I by deeds will make thee rue those words. (*Calling to his servants*) Ho! bid wood-cutters go, some to Helicon, others to the glens of Parnassus, and cut me logs of oak, and when they are brought to the town, pile up a stack of wood all

round the altar on either side thereof, and set fire to it and burn them all alive, that they may learn that the dead no longer rules this land, but that for the present I am king. (*angrily to the* CHORUS) As for you, old men, since ye thwart my views, not for the children of Heracles alone shall ye lament, but likewise for every blow that strikes his house, and ye shall ne'er forget ye are slaves and I your prince.

LEADER

Ye sons of Earth, whom Ares on a day did sow, when from the dragon's ravening jaw he had torn the teeth, up with your staves, whereon ye lean your hands, and dash out this miscreant's brains! a fellow who, without even being a Theban, but a foreigner, lords it shamefully o'er the younger folk; but *my* master shalt thou never be to thy joy, nor shalt thou reap the harvest of all my toil; begone with my curse upon thee! carry thy insolence back to the place whence it came. For never whilst I live, shalt thou slay these sons of Heracles; not so deep beneath the earth hath their father disappeared from his children's ken. Thou art in possession of this land which thou hast ruined, while he its benefactor has missed his just reward; and yet do I take too much upon myself because I help those I love after their death, when most they need a friend? Ah! right hand, how fain wouldst thou wield the spear, but thy weakness is a death-blow to thy fond desire; for then had I stopped thee calling me slave, and I would have governed Thebes, wherein thou art now exulting, with credit; for a city sick with dissension and evil counsels thinketh not aright; otherwise it would never have accepted thee as its master.

MEGARA

Old sirs, I thank you; 'tis right that friends should feel virtuous indignation on behalf of those they love; but do not on our account vent your anger on the tyrant to your own undoing. Hear my advice, Amphitryon, if haply there appear to thee to be aught in what I say. I love my children; strange if I did not love those whom I laboured to bring forth! Death I count a dreadful fate; but the man who wrestles with necessity I esteem a fool. Since we must die, let us do so without being burnt alive, to furnish our foes with food for merriment, which to my mind is an evil worse than death; for many a fair guerdon do we owe our family. Thine has ever been a warrior's fair fame, so 'tis not to be endured that thou shouldst die a coward's death; and my husband's reputation needs no one to witness that he would ne'er consent to save these children's lives by letting them incur the stain of cowardice; for the noble are afflicted by disgrace on account of their children, nor must I shrink from following my lord's example. As to thy hopes consider how I weigh them. Thou thinkest thy son will return from beneath the earth: who ever has come

back from the dead out of the halls of Hades? Thou hast a hope perhaps of softening this man by entreaty: no, no! better to fly from one's enemy when he is so brutish, but yield to men of breeding and wisdom; for thou wilt more easily obtain mercy there by friendly overtures. True, a thought has already occurred to me that we might by entreaty obtain a sentence of exile for the children; yet this too is misery, to compass their deliverance with dire penury as the result; for 'tis a saying that hosts look sweetly on banished friends for a day and no more. Steel thy heart to die with us, for that awaits thee after all. By thy brave soul I challenge thee, old friend; for whoso struggles hard to escape destiny shows zeal no doubt, but 'tis zeal with a taint of folly; for what must be, no one will ever avail to alter.

LEADER

If a man had insulted thee, while yet my arms were lusty, there would have been an easy way to stop him; but now am I a thing of naught; and so thou henceforth, Amphitryon, must scheme how to avert misfortune.

AMPHITRYON

'Tis not cowardice or any longing for life that hinders my dying, but my wish to save my son's children, though no doubt I am vainly wishing for impossibilities. Lo! here is my neck ready for thy sword to pierce, my body for thee to hack or hurl from the rock; only one boon I crave for both of us, O king; slay me and this hapless mother before thou slay the children, that we may not see the hideous sight, as they gasp out their lives, calling on their mother and their father's sire; for the rest work thy will, if so thou art inclined; for we have no defence against death.

MEGARA

I too implore thee add a second boon, that by thy single act thou mayst put us both under a double obligation; suffer me to deck my children in the robes of death,—first opening the palace gates, for now are we shut out,—that this at least they may obtain from their father's halls.

LYCUS

I grant it, and bid my servants undo the bolts. Go in and deck yourselves; robes I grudge not. But soon as ye have clothed yourselves, I will return to you to consign you to the nether world.

(LYCUS *and his retinue withdraw.*)

MEGARA

Children, follow the footsteps of your hapless mother to your father's halls, where others possess his substance, though his name is still ours.

(MEGARA *and her children enter the palace.*)

AMPHITRYON

O Zeus, in vain, it seems, did I get thee to share my bride with me; in vain used we to call thee father of my son. After all thou art less our friend than thou didst pretend. Great god as thou art, I, a mere mortal, surpass thee in true worth. For I did not betray the children of Heracles; but thou by stealth didst find thy way to my couch, taking another's wife without leave given, while to save thy own friends thou hast no skill. Either thou art a god of little sense, or else naturally unjust.

(AMPHITRYON *follows* MEGARA *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Phoebus is singing a plaintive dirge to drown his happier strains, striking with key of gold his sweet-tongued lyre; so too am I fain to sing a song of praise, a crown to all his toil, concerning him who is gone to the gloom beneath the nether world, whether I am to call him son of Zeus or of Amphitryon. For the praise of noble toils accomplished is a glory to the dead. First he cleared the grove of Zeus of a lion, and put its skin upon his back, hiding his auburn hair in its fearful gaping jaws;

antistrophe 1

Then on a day, with murderous bow he wounded the race of wild Centaurs, that range the hills, slaying them with winged shafts; Peneus, the river of fair eddies, knows him well, and those far fields unharvested, and the steadings on Pelion and they who haunt the glens of Homole bordering thereupon, whence they rode forth to conquer Thessaly, arming themselves with pines for clubs; likewise he slew that dappled hind with horns of gold, that preyed upon the country-folk, glorifying Artemis, huntress queen of Oenoe;

strophe 2

Next he mounted on a car and tamed with the bit the steeds of Diomede, that greedily champed their bloody food at gory mangers with jaws unbridled, devouring with hideous joy the flesh of men; then crossing Hebrus' silver stream he still toiled on to perform the hests of the tyrant of Mycenae, till he came to the strand of the Malian gulf by the streams of Anaurus, where he slew with his arrows Cycnus, murderer of his guests, the savage wretch who dwelt in Amphanae;

antistrophe 2

Also he came to those minstrel maids, to their orchard in the west, to pluck from the leafy apple-tree its golden fruit, when he had slain

the tawny dragon, whose awful coils were twined all round to guard it; and he made his way into ocean's lairs, bringing calm to men that use the oar; moreover he sought the home of Atlas, and stretched out his hands to uphold the firmament, and on his manly shoulders took the starry mansions of the gods;

strophe 3

Then he went through the waves of heaving Euxine against the mounted host of Amazons dwelling round Maeotis, the lake that is fed by many a stream, having gathered to his standard all his friends from Hellas, to fetch the gold-embroidered raiment of the warrior queen, a deadly quest for a girdle. And Hellas won those glorious spoils of the barbarian maid, and safe in Mycenae are they now. On Lerna's murderous hound, the many-headed hydra, he set his brand-ing-iron, and smeared its venom on his darts, wherewith he slew the shepherd of Erytheia, a monster with three bodies;

antistrophe 3

And many another glorious achievement he brought to a happy issue; to Hades' house of tears hath he now sailed, the goal of his labours, where he is ending his career of toil, nor cometh he thence again. Now is thy house left without a friend, and Charon's boat awaits thy children to bear them on that journey out of life, whence is no returning, contrary to God's law and man's justice; and it is to thy prowess that thy house is looking although thou art not here. Had I been strong and lusty, able to brandish the spear in battle's onset, my Theban compeers too, I would have stood by thy children to champion them; but now my happy youth is gone and I am left.

But lo! I see the children of Heracles who was erst so great, clad in the vesture of the grave, and his loving wife dragging her babes along at her side, and that hero's aged sire. Ah! woe is me! no longer can I stem the flood of tears that spring to my old eyes.

(MEGARA, AMPHITRYON, *and the children enter from the palace.*)

MEGARA

Come now, who is to sacrifice or butcher these poor children? or rob me of my wretched life? Behold! the victims are ready to be led to Hades' halls. O my children! an ill-matched company are we hurried off to die, old men and babes, and mothers, all together. Alas! for my sad fate and my children's, whom these eyes now for the last time behold. So I gave you birth and reared you only for our foes to mock, to flout, and slay. Ah me! how bitterly my hopes have disappointed me in the expectation I once formed from the words of your father. (*Addressing each of her sons*

in turn) To *thee* thy dead sire was for giving Argos; and thou wert to dwell in the halls of Eurystheus, lording it o'er the fair fruitful land of Argolis; and o'er thy head would he throw that lion's skin wherewith himself was girt. *Thou* wert to be king of Thebes, famed for its chariots, receiving as thy heritage my broad lands, for so thou didst coax thy father dear; and to thy hand used he to resign the carved club, his sure defence, pretending to give it thee. To *thee* he promised to give Oechalia, which once his archery had wasted. Thus with three principalities would your father exalt you his three sons, proud of your manliness; while I was choosing the best brides for you, scheming to link you by marriage to Athens, Thebes, and Sparta, that ye might live a happy life with a fast sheet-anchor to hold by. And now that is all vanished; fortune's breeze hath veered and given to you for brides the maidens of death in their stead, and tears to me to bathe them in; woe is me for my foolish thoughts! and your grandsire here is celebrating your marriage-feast, accepting Hades as the father of your brides, a grim relationship to make. Ah me! which of you shall I first press to my bosom, which last? on which bestow my kiss, or clasp close to me? Oh! would that like the bee with russet wing, I could collect from every source my sighs in one, and, blending them together, shed them in one copious flood! Heracles, dear husband mine, to thee I call, if haply mortal voice can make itself heard in Hades' halls; thy father and children are dying, and I am doomed, I who once because of thee was counted blest as men count bliss. Come to our rescue; appear, I pray, if but as a phantom, since thy mere coming would be enough, for they are cowards compared with thee, who are slaying thy children.

AMPHITRYON

Lady, do thou prepare the funeral rites; but I, O Zeus, stretching out my hand to heaven, call on thee to help these children, if such be thy intention; for soon will any aid of thine be unavailing; and yet thou hast been oft invoked; my toil is wasted; death seems inevitable. Ye aged friends, the joys of life are few; so take heed that ye pass through it as gladly as ye may, without a thought of sorrow from morn till night; for time recks little of preserving our hopes; and, when he has busied himself on his own business, away he flies. Look at me, a man who had made a mark amongst his fellows by deeds of note; yet hath fortune in a single day robbed me of it as of a feather that floats away toward the sky. I know not any whose plenteous wealth and high reputation is fixed and sure; fare ye well, for now have ye seen the last of your old friend, my comrades.

(MEGARA *catches sight of* HERACLES *approaching.*)

MEGARA

Ha! old friend, is it my own, my dearest I behold? or what am I to say?

AMPHITRYON

I know not, my daughter; I too am struck dumb.

MEGARA

Is this he who, they told us, was beneath the earth?

AMPHITRYON

'Tis he, unless some day-dream mocks our sight.

MEGARA

What am I saying? What visions do these anxious eyes behold? Old man, this is none other than thy own son. Come hither, my children, cling to your father's robe, make haste to come, never loose your hold, for here is one to help you, nowise behind our saviour Zeus.

(HERACLES *enters.*)

HERACLES

All hail! my house, and portals of my home, how glad am I to emerge to the light and see thee. Ha! what is this? I see my children before the house in the garb of death, with chaplets on their heads, and my wife amid a throng of men, and my father weeping o'er some mischance. Let me draw near to them and inquire; lady, what strange stroke of fate hath fallen on the house?

MEGARA

Dearest of all mankind to me! O ray of light appearing to thy sire! art thou safe, and is thy coming just in time to help thy dear ones?

HERACLES

What meanest thou? what is this confusion I find on my arrival, father?

MEGARA

We are being ruined; forgive me, old friend, if I have anticipated that which thou hadst a right to tell him; for woman's nature is perhaps more prone than man's to grief, and they are my children that were being led to death, which was my own lot too.

HERACLES

Great Apollo! what a prelude to thy story!

MEGARA

Dead are my brethren, dead my hoary sire.

HERACLES
How so? what befell him? who dealt the fatal blow?

MEGARA
Lycus, our splendid monarch, slew him.

HERACLES
Did he meet him in fair fight, or was the land sick and weak?

MEGARA
Aye, from faction; now is he master of the city of Cadmus with its seven gates.

HERACLES
Why hath panic fallen on thee and my aged sire?

MEGARA
He meant to kill thy father, me, and my children.

HERACLES
Why, what had he to fear from my orphan babes?

MEGARA
He was afraid they might some day avenge Creon's death.

HERACLES
What means this dress they wear, suited to the dead?

MEGARA
'Tis the garb of death we have already put on.

HERACLES
And were ye being haled to death? O woe is me!

MEGARA
Yes, deserted by every friend, and informed that thou wert dead.

HERACLES
What put such desperate thoughts into your heads?

MEGARA
That was what the heralds of Eurystheus kept proclaiming.

HERACLES
Why did ye leave my hearth and home?

MEGARA
He forced us; thy father was dragged from his bed.

HERACLES

Had he no mercy, to ill-use the old man so?

MEGARA

Mercy forsooth! that goddess and he dwell far enough apart.

HERACLES

Was I so poor in friends in my absence?

MEGARA

Who are the friends of a man in misfortune?

HERACLES

Do they make so light of my hard warring with the Minyae?

MEGARA

Misfortune, to repeat it to thee, has no friends.

HERACLES

Cast from your heads these chaplets of death, look up to the light, for instead of the nether gloom your eyes behold the welcome sun. I, meantime, since here is work for my hand, will first go raze this upstart tyrant's halls, and when I have beheaded the miscreant, I will throw him to dogs to tear; and every Theban who I find has played the traitor after my kindness, will I destroy with this victorious club; the rest will I scatter with my feathered shafts and fill Ismenus full of bloody corpses, and Dirce's clear fount shall run red with gore. For whom ought I to help rather than wife and children and aged sire? Farewell my labours! for it was in vain I accomplished them rather than succoured these. And yet I ought to die in their defence, since they for their sire were doomed; else what shall we find so noble in having fought a hydra and a lion at the hests of Eurystheus, if I make no effort to save my own children from death? No longer I trow, as heretofore, shall I be called Heracles the victor.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

'Tis only right that parents should help their children, their aged sires, and the partners of their marriage.

AMPHITRYON

My son, 'tis like thee to show thy love for thy dear ones and thy hate for all that is hostile; only curb excessive hastiness.

HERACLES

Wherein, father, am I now showing more than fitting haste?

AMPHITRYON

The king hath a host of allies, needy villains though pretending to be rich, who sowed dissension and o'erthrew the state with a view to plundering their neighbours; for the wealth they had in their houses was all spent, dissipated by their sloth. Thou wast seen entering the city; and, that being so, beware that thou bring not thy enemies together and be slain unawares.

HERACLES

Little I reck if the whole city saw me; but chancing to see a bird perched in an ill-omened spot, from it I learnt that some trouble had befallen my house; so I purposely made my entry to the land by stealth.

AMPHITRYON

For thy lucky coming hither, go salute thy household altar, and let thy father's halls behold thy face. For soon will the king be here in person to drag away thy wife and children and murder them, and to add me to the bloody list. But if thou remain on the spot all will go well, and thou wilt profit by this security; but do not rouse thy city ere thou hast these matters well in train, my son.

HERACLES

I will do so; thy advice is good; I will enter my house. After my return at length from the sunless den of Hades and the maiden queen of hell, I will not neglect to greet first of all the gods beneath my roof.

AMPHITRYON

Why, didst thou in very deed go to the house of Hades, my son?

HERACLES

Aye, and brought to the light that three-headed monster.

AMPHITRYON

Didst worst him in fight, or receive him from the goddess?

HERACLES

In fair fight; for I had been lucky enough to witness the rites of the initiated.[1]

AMPHITRYON

Is the monster really lodged in the house of Eurystheus?

HERACLES

The grove of Demeter and the city of Hermione are his prison.

AMPHITRYON

Does not Eurystheus know that thou hast returned to the upper world?

HERACLES
He knows not; I came hither first to learn your news.

AMPHITRYON
How is it thou wert so long beneath the earth?

HERACLES
I stayed awhile attempting to bring back Theseus from Hades, father.

AMPHITRYON
Where is he? gone to his native land?

HERACLES
He set out for Athens right glad to have escaped from the lower world. Come, children, attend your father to the house. My entering in is fairer in your eyes, I trow, than my going out. Take heart, and no more let the tears stream from your eyes; thou too, dear wife, collect thy courage, cease from fear; let go my robe; for I cannot fly away, nor have I any wish to flee from those I love. Ah! they do not loose their hold, but cling to my garments all the more; were ye in such jeopardy? Well, I must lead them, taking them by the hand to draw them after me, like a ship when towing; for I too do not reject the care of my children; here all mankind are equal; all love their children, both those of high estate and those who are naught; 'tis wealth that makes distinctions among them; some have, others want; but all the human race loves its offspring.
(HERACLES, MEGARA, AMPHITRYON *and the children enter the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Dear to me is youth, but old age is ever hanging o'er my head, a burden heavier than Aetna's crags, casting its pall of gloom upon my eyes. Oh! never may the wealth of Asia's kings tempt me to barter for houses stored with gold my happy youth, which is in wealth and poverty alike most fair! But old age is gloomy and deathly; I hate it; let it sink beneath the waves! Would it had never found its way to the homes and towns of mortal men, but were still drifting on for ever down the wind.

antistrophe 1

Had the gods shown discernment and wisdom, as mortals count these things, men would have gotten youth twice over, a visible mark of worth amongst whomsoever found, and after death would these have retraced their steps once more to the sun-light, while the mean man would have had but a single portion of life; and thus would it have been possible to distinguish the good and the

bad, just as sailors know the number of the stars amid the clouds. But, as it is, the gods have set no certain boundary 'twixt good and bad, but time's onward roll brings increase only to man's wealth.

strophe 2

Never will I cease to link in one the Graces and the Muses, fairest union. Never may my lines be cast among untutored boors, but ever may I find a place among the crownèd choir! Yes, still the aged bard lifts up his voice of bygone memories; still is my song of the triumphs of Heracles, whether Bromius the giver of wine is nigh, or the strains of the seven-stringed lyre and the Libyan flute are rising; not yet will I cease to sing the Muses' praise, my patrons in the dance.

antistrophe 2

As the maids of Delos raise their song of joy, circling round the temple gates in honour of Leto's fair son, the graceful dancer; so I with my old lips will sing songs of victory at thy palace-doors, a song of my old age, such as sings the dying swan; for there is a goodly theme for minstrelsy; he is the son of Zeus; yet high above his noble birth tower his deeds of prowess, for his toil secured this life of calm for man, having destroyed all fearsome beasts.

(AMPHITRYON *comes out of the palace as* LYCUS *and his retinue enter.*)

LYCUS

Ha! Amphitryon, 'tis high time thou camest forth from the palace; ye have been too long arraying yourselves in the robes and trappings of the dead. Come, bid the wife and children of Heracles show themselves outside the house, to die on the conditions you yourselves offered.

AMPHITRYON

O king, thou dost persecute me in my misery and heapest insult upon me over and above the loss of my son; thou shouldst have been more moderate in thy zeal, though thou art my lord and master. But since thou dost impose death's stern necessity on me, needs must I acquiesce and do thy will.

LYCUS

Pray, where is Megara? where are the children of Alcmena's son?

AMPHITRYON

She, I believe, so far as I can guess from outside—

LYCUS
What grounds hast thou to base thy fancy on?

AMPHITRYON
Is sitting as a suppliant on the altar's hallowed steps.

LYCUS
Imploring them quite uselessly to save her life.

AMPHITRYON
And calling on her dead husband, quite in vain.

LYCUS
He is nowhere near, and he certainly will never come.

AMPHITRYON
No, unless perhaps a god should raise him from the dead.

LYCUS
Go to her and bring her from the palace.

AMPHITRYON
By doing so I should become an accomplice in her murder.

LYCUS
Since thou hast this scruple, I, who have left fear behind, will myself bring out the mother and her children. Follow me, servants, that we may put an end to this delay of our work to our joy.

(LYCUS *and his servants enter the palace.*)

AMPHITRYON
Then go thy way along the path of fate; for what remains, maybe another will provide. Expect for thy evil deeds to find some ill thyself. Ah! my aged friends, he is marching fairly to his doom; soon will he be entangled in the snare of the sword, thinking to slay his neighbours, the villain! I will hence, to see him fall dead; for the sight of a foe being slain and paying the penalty of his misdeeds gives pleasure.

(AMPHITRYON *follows* LYCUS *into the palace.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

Evil has changed sides; he who was erst a mighty king is now turning his life backward into the road to Hades.

Hail to thee! Justice and heavenly retribution.

At last hast thou reached the goal where thy death will pay the forfeit,

For thy insults against thy betters.

Joy makes my tears burst forth.

There is come a retribution, which the prince of the land never once thought in his heart would happen.

Come, old friends, let us look within to see if one we know has met the fate I hope.

LYCUS (*within*)

Ah me! ah me!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Ha! how sweet to hear that opening note of his within the house; death is not far off him now.

Hark! the prince cries out in his agony; that preludes death.

LYCUS (*within*)

O kingdom of Cadmus, by treachery I am perishing!

CHORUS (*singing*)

Thou wert thyself for making others perish; endure thy retribution; 'tis only the penalty of thy own deeds thou art paying.

Who was he, weak son of man, that aimed his silly saying at the blessed gods of heaven with impious blasphemy, maintaining that they are weaklings after all?

Old friends, our godless foe is now no more.

The house is still; let us to our dancing.

Yea, for fortune smiles upon my friends as I desire.

strophe 1

Dances and banquets now prevail throughout the holy town of Thebes. For release from tears and respite from sorrow give birth to song. The upstart king is dead and gone; our former monarch now is prince, having made his way even from the bourn of Acheron. Hope beyond all expectation is fulfilled.

antistrophe 1

To heed the right and wrong is heaven's care. 'Tis their gold and their good luck that lead men's hearts astray, bringing in their train unholy tyranny. For no man ever had the courage to reflect what reverses time might bring; but, disregarding law to gratify lawlessness, he shatters in gloom the car of happiness.

strophe 2

Deck thee with garlands, O Ismenus! break forth into dancing, ye paved streets of our seven-gated city! come Dirce, fount of

waters fair; and joined with her ye daughters of Asopus, come from your father's waves to add your maiden voices to our hymn, the victor's prize that Heracles hath won. O Pythian rock, with forests crowned, and haunts of the Muses on Helicon! make my city and her walls re-echo with cries of joy; where sprang the earth-born crop to view, a warrior-host with shields of brass, who are handing on their realm to children's children, a light divine to Thebes.

antistrophe 2

All hail the marriage! wherein two bridegrooms shared; the one, a mortal; the other, Zeus, who came to wed the maiden sprung from Perseus; for that marriage of thine, O Zeus, in days gone by has been proved to me a true story beyond all expectation; and time hath shown the lustre of Heracles' prowess, who emerged from caverns 'neath the earth after leaving Pluto's halls below. To me art thou a worthier lord than that base-born king, who now lets it be plainly seen in this struggle 'twixt armed warriors, whether justice still finds favour in heaven.

(*The spectres of* MADNESS *and* IRIS *appear from above. The* CHORUS *sees them.*)

Ha! see there, my old comrades! is the same wild panic fallen on us all; what phantom is this I see hovering o'er the house? Fly, fly, bestir thy tardy steps! begone! away! O saviour prince, avert calamity from me!

IRIS

Courage, old men! she, whom you see, is Madness, daughter of Night, and I am Iris, the handmaid of the gods. We have not come to do your city any hurt, but against the house of one man only is our warfare, even against him whom they call the son of Zeus and Alcmena. For until he had finished all his grievous toils, Destiny was preserving him, nor would father Zeus ever suffer me or Hera to harm him. But now that he hath accomplished the labours of Eurystheus, Hera is minded to brand him with the guilt of shedding kindred blood by slaying his own children, and I am one with her. Come then, maid unwed, child of murky Night, harden thy heart relentlessly, send forth frenzy upon him, confound his mind even to the slaying of his children, drive him, goad him wildly on his mad career, shake out the sails of death, that when he has sent o'er Acheron's ferry that fair group of children by his own murderous hand, he may learn to know how fiercely against him the wrath of Hera burns and may also experience mine; otherwise, if he escape punishment, the gods will become as naught, while man's power will grow.

MADNESS

Of noble parents was I born, the daughter of Night, sprung from the blood of Uranus; and these prerogatives I hold, not to use them in anger against friends, nor have I any joy in visiting the homes of men; and fain would I counsel Hera, before I see her err, and thee too, if ye will hearken to my words. This man, against whose house thou art sending me, has made himself a name alike in heaven and earth; for, after taming pathless wilds and raging sea, he by his single might raised up again the honours of the gods when sinking before man's impiety; wherefore I counsel thee, do not wish him dire mishaps.

IRIS

Spare us *thy* advice on Hera's and my schemes.

MADNESS

I seek to turn thy steps into the best path instead of into this one of evil.

IRIS

'Twas not to practice self-control that the wife of Zeus sent thee hither.

MADNESS

I call the sun-god to witness that herein I am acting against my will; but if indeed I must forthwith serve thee and Hera and follow you in full cry as hounds follow the huntsman, why go I will; nor shall ocean with its moaning waves, nor the earthquake, nor the thunderbolt with blast of agony be half so furious as the headlong rush I will make into the breast of Heracles; through his roof will I burst my way and swoop upon his house, after first slaying his children; nor shall their murderer know that he is killing his own-begotten babes, till he is released from my madness. Behold him! see how even now he is wildly tossing his head at the outset, and rolling his eyes fiercely from side to side without a word; nor can he control his panting breath; but like a bull in act to charge, he bellows fearfully, calling on the goddesses of nether hell. Soon will I rouse thee to yet wilder dancing and sound a note of terror in thine ear. Soar away, O Iris, to Olympus on thy honoured course; while I unseen will steal into the halls of Heracles.

(IRIS *and* MADNESS *vanish.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Alas! alas! lament, O city; the son of Zeus, thy fairest bloom, is being cut down.

Woe is thee, Hellas! that wilt cast from thee thy benefactor, and destroy him as he madly, wildly dances where no pipe is heard.

She is mounted on her car, the queen of sorrow and sighing, and

is goading on her steeds, as if for outrage, the Gorgon child of Night, with hundred hissing serpent-heads, Madness of the flashing eyes.

Soon hath the god changed his good fortune; soon will his children breathe their last, slain by a father's hand.

Ah me! alas! soon will vengeance, mad, relentless, lay low by a cruel death thy unhappy son, O Zeus, exacting a full penalty.

Alas, O house! the fiend begins her dance of death without the cymbal's crash, with no glad waving of the wine-god's staff.

Woe to these halls! toward bloodshed she moves, and not to pour libations of the juice of the grape.

O children, haste to fly; that is the chant of death her piping plays.

Ah, yes! he is chasing the children. Never, ah! never will Madness lead her revel rout in vain.

Ah misery!

Ah me! how I lament that aged sire, that mother too that bore his babes in vain.

Look! look!

A tempest rocks the house; the roof is falling with it.

Oh! what art thou doing, son of Zeus?

Thou art sending hell's confusion against thy house, as erst did Pallas on Enceladus.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters from the palace.*)

MESSENGER

Ye hoary men of eld!

CHORUS

Why, oh! why this loud address to me?

MESSENGER

Awful is the sight within!

CHORUS

No need for me to call another to announce that.

MESSENGER

Dead lie the children.

CHORUS

Alas!

MESSENGER

Ah weep! for here is cause for weeping.

CHORUS

A cruel murder, wrought by parents' hands!

MESSENGER

No words can utter more than we have suffered.

CHORUS

What, canst thou prove this piteous ruin was a father's outrage on his children? Tell me how these heaven-sent woes came rushing on the house; say how the children met their sad mischance.

MESSENGER

Victims to purify the house were stationed before the altar of Zeus, for Heracles had slain and cast from his halls the king of the land. There stood his group of lovely children, with his sire and Megara; and already the basket was being passed round the altar, and we were keeping holy silence. But just as Alcmena's son was bringing the torch in his right hand to dip it in the holy water, he stopped without a word. And as their father lingered, his children looked at him; and lo! he was changed; his eyes were rolling; he was distraught; his eyeballs were bloodshot and starting from their sockets, and foam was oozing down his bearded cheek. Anon he spoke, laughing the while a madman's laugh, "Father, why should I sacrifice before I have slain Eurystheus, why kindle the purifying flame and have the toil twice over, when I might at one stroke so fairly end it all? Soon as I have brought the head of Eurystheus hither, I will cleanse my hands for those already slain. Spill the water, cast the baskets from your hands. Ho! give me now my bow and club! To famed Mycenae will I go; crow-bars and pick-axes must I take, for I will heave from their very base with iron levers those city-walls which the Cyclopes squared with red plumb-line and mason's tools."

Then he set out, and though he had no chariot there, he thought he had, and was for mounting to its seat, and using a goad as though his fingers really held one. A twofold feeling filled his servants' breasts, half amusement, and half fear; and one looking to his neighbour said, "Is our master making sport for us, or is he mad?" But he the while was pacing to and fro in his house; and, rushing into the men's chamber, he thought he had reached the city of Nisus, albeit he had gone into his own halls. So he threw himself upon the floor, as if he were there, and made ready to feast. But after waiting a brief space he began saying he was on his way to the plains amid the valleys of the Isthmus; and then stripping himself of his mantle, he fell to competing with an imaginary rival, o'er whom he proclaimed himself victor with his own voice, calling on imaginary spectators to listen. Next, fancy carrying him to Mycenae, he was uttering fearful threats against Eurystheus. Meantime his father caught

him by his stalwart arm, and thus addressed him, "My son, what meanest thou hereby? What strange doings are these? Can it be that the blood of thy late victims has driven thee frantic?" But he, supposing it was the father of Eurystheus striving in abject supplication to touch his hand, thrust him aside, and then against his own children aimed his bow and made ready his quiver, thinking to slay the sons of Eurystheus. And they in wild affright darted hither and thither, one to his hapless mother's skirts, another to the shadow of a pillar, while a third cowered 'neath the altar like a bird. Then cried their mother, "O father, what art thou doing? dost mean to slay thy children?" Likewise his aged sire and all the gathered servants cried aloud. But he, hunting the child round and round the column, in dreadful circles, and coming face to face with him shot him to the heart; and he fell upon his back, sprinkling the stone pillars with blood as he gasped out his life. Then did Heracles shout for joy and boasted loud, "Here lies one of Eurystheus' brood dead at my feet, atoning for his father's hate." Against a second did he aim his bow, who had crouched at the altar's foot thinking to escape unseen. But ere he fired, the poor child threw himself at his father's knees, and, flinging his hand to reach his beard or neck, cried, "Oh! slay me not, dear father mine! I am thy child, thine own; 'tis no son of Eurystheus thou wilt slay."

But that other, with savage Gorgon-scowl, as the child now stood in range of his baleful archery, smote him on the head, as smites a smith his molten iron, bringing down his club upon the fair-haired boy, and crushed the bones. The second caught, away he hies to add a third victim to the other twain. But ere he could, the poor mother caught up her babe and carried him within the house and shut the doors; forthwith the madman, as though he really were at the Cyclopean walls, prizes open the doors with levers, and, hurling down their posts, with one fell shaft laid low his wife and child. Then in wild career he starts to slay his aged sire; but lo! there came a phantom,—so it seemed to us on-lookers,—of Pallas, with plumed helm, brandishing a spear; and she hurled a rock against the breast of Heracles, which stayed him from his frenzied thirst for blood and plunged him into sleep; to the ground he fell, smiting his back against a column that had fallen on the floor in twain when the roof fell in. Thereon we rallied from our flight, and with the old man's aid bound him fast with knotted cords to the pillar, that on his awakening he might do no further evil. So there he sleeps, poor wretch! a sleep that is not blest, having murdered wife and children; nay, for my part I know not any son of man more miserable than he.

(*The* MESSENGER *withdraws.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

That murder wrought by the daughters of Danaus, whereof my native Argos wots, was formerly the most famous and notorious in Hellas; but this hath surpassed and outdone those previous horrors. I could tell of the murder of that poor son of Zeus, whom Procne, mother of an only child, slew and offered to the Muses; [2] but thou hadst three children, wretched parent, and all of them hast thou in thy frenzy slain. What groans or wails, what funeral dirge, or chant of death am I to raise? Alas and woe! see, the bolted doors of the lofty palace are being rolled apart. Ah me! behold these children lying dead before their wretched father, who is sunk in awful slumber after shedding their blood. Round him are bonds and cords, made fast with many a knot about the body of Heracles, and lashed to the stone columns of his house. While he, the aged sire, like mother-bird wailing her unfledged brood, comes hasting hither with halting steps on his bitter journey.

(*The central doors of the palace have opened and have disclosed* HERACLES *lying asleep, bound to a shattered column.* AMPHITRYON *steps out. The following lines between* AMPHITRYON *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively.*)

AMPHITRYON

Softly, softly! ye aged sons of Thebes, let him sleep on and forget his sorrows.

CHORUS

For thee, old friend, I weep and mourn, for the children too and that victorious chief.

AMPHITRYON

Stand further off, make no noise nor outcry, rouse him not from his calm deep slumber.

CHORUS

O horrible! all this blood—

AMPHITRYON

Hush, hush! ye will be my ruin.

CHORUS

That he has spilt is rising up against him.

AMPHITRYON

Gently raise your dirge of woe, old friends; lest he wake, and, bursting his bonds, destroy the city, rend his sire, and dash his house to pieces.

CHORUS

I cannot, cannot—

AMPHITRYON

Hush! let me note his breathing; come, let me put my ear close.

CHORUS

Is he sleeping?

AMPHITRYON

Aye, that is he, a deathly sleep, having slain wife and children with the arrows of his twanging bow.

CHORUS

Ah! mourn—

AMPHITRYON

I do.

CHORUS

The children's death;

AMPHITRYON

Ah me!

CHORUS

And thy own son's doom.

AMPHITRYON

Ah misery!

CHORUS

Old friend—

AMPHITRYON

Hush! hush! he is turning, he is waking! Oh! let me hide myself beneath the covert of yon roof.

CHORUS

Courage! darkness still broods o'er thy son's eye.

AMPHITRYON

Oh! beware; 'tis not that I shrink from leaving the light after my miseries, poor wretch! but should he slay me that am his father, then will he be devising woe on woe, and to the avenging curse will add a parent's blood.

CHORUS

Well for thee hadst thou died in that day, when, to win they wife, thou didst go forth to exact vengeance for her slain brethren by sacking the Taphians' sea-beat town.

AMPHITRYON

Fly, fly, my aged friends, haste from before the palace, escape his waking fury! For soon will he heap up fresh carnage on the old, ranging wildly once more through the streets of Thebes.

CHORUS

O Zeus, why hast thou shown such savage hate against thine own son and plunged him in this sea of troubles?

HERACLES (*waking*)

Aha! my breath returns; I am alive; and my eyes see, opening on the sky and earth and yon sun's darting beam; but how my senses reel! in what strange turmoil am I plunged! my fevered breath in quick spasmodic gasps escapes my lungs. How now? why am I lying here, made fast with cables like a ship, my brawny chest and arms tied to a shattered piece of masonry, with corpses for my neighbours; while o'er the floor my bow and arrows are scattered, that erst like trusty squires to my arm both kept me safe and were kept safe of me? Surely I am not come a second time to Hades' halls, having just returned from thence for Eurystheus? No, I do not see Sisyphus with his stone, or Pluto, or his queen, Demeter's child. Surely I am distraught; I cannot remember where I am. Ho, there! which of my friends is near or far to help me in my ignorance? For I have no clear knowledge of things once familiar.

AMPHITRYON

My aged friends, shall I approach the scene of my sorrow?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yes, and let me go with thee, nor desert thee in thy trouble.

HERACLES

Father, why dost thou weep and veil thy eyes, standing aloof from thy beloved son?

AMPHITRYON

My child! mine still, for all thy misery.

HERACLES

Why, what is there so sad in my case that thou dost weep?

AMPHITRYON

That which might make any of the gods weep, were he to suffer so.

HERACLES

A bold assertion that, but thou art not yet explaining what has happened.

AMPHITRYON

Thine own eyes see that, if by this time thou are restored to thy senses.

HERACLES

Fill in thy sketch if any change awaits my life.

AMPHITRYON

I will explain, if thou art no longer mad as a fiend of hell.

HERACLES

God help us! what suspicions these dark hints of thine again excite!

AMPHITRYON

I am still doubtful whether thou art in thy sober senses.

HERACLES

I never remember being mad.

AMPHITRYON

Am I to loose my son, old friends, or what?

HERACLES

Loose and say who bound me; for I feel shame at this.

AMPHITRYON

Rest content with what thou knowest of thy woes; the rest forego.

HERACLES

Enough! I have no wish to probe thy silence.

AMPHITRYON

O Zeus, dost thou behold these deeds proceeding from the throne of Hera?

HERACLES

What! have I suffered something from her enmity?

AMPHITRYON

A truce to the goddess! attend to thy own troubles.

HERACLES
I am undone; what mischance wilt thou unfold?

AMPHITRYON
See here the corpses of thy children.

HERACLES
O horror! what hideous sight is here? ah me!

AMPHITRYON
My son, against thy children hast thou waged unnatural war.

HERACLES
War! what meanst thou? who killed these?

AMPHITRYON
Thou and thy bow and some god, whoso he be that is to blame.

HERACLES
What sayst thou? what have I done? Speak, father, thou messenger of evil.

AMPHITRYON
Thou wert distraught; 'tis a sad explanation thou art asking.

HERACLES
Was it I that slew my wife also?

AMPHITRYON
Thy own unaided arm hath done all this.

HERACLES
Ah, woe is me! a cloud of sorrow wraps me round.

AMPHITRYON
The reason this that I lament thy fate.

HERACLES
Did I dash my house to pieces or incite others thereto?

AMPHITRYON
Naught know I save this, that thou art utterly undone.

HERACLES
Where did my frenzy seize me? where did it destroy me?

AMPHITRYON
In the moment thou wert purifying thyself with fire at the altar.

HERACLES

Ah me! why do I spare my own life when I have taken that of my dear children? Shall I not hasten to leap from some sheer rock, or aim the sword against my heart and avenge my children's blood, or burn my body in the fire and so avert from my life the infamy which now awaits me?

But hither I see Theseus coming to check my deadly counsels, my kinsman and friend. Now shall I stand revealed, and the dearest of my friends will see the pollution I have incurred by my children's murder. Ah, woe is me! what am I to do? Where can I find release from my sorrows? shall I take wings or plunge beneath the earth? Come, let me veil my head in darkness; for I am ashamed of the evil I have done, and, since for these I have incurred fresh blood-guiltiness, I would fain not harm the innocent.

(THESEUS *and his retinue enter.*)

THESEUS

I am come, and others with me, young warriors from the land of Athens, encamped by the streams of Asopus, to help thy son, old friend. For a rumour reached the city of the Erechtheidae, that Lycus had usurped the sceptre of this land and was become your enemy even to battle. Wherefore I came making recompense for the former kindness of Heracles in saving me from the world below, if haply ye have any need of such aid as I or my allies can give, old prince.

Ha! what means this heap of dead upon the floor? Surely I have not delayed too long and come too late to check new ills? Who slew these children? whose wife is this I see? Boys do not go to battle; nay, it must be some other strange mischance I here discover.

(*The following lines between* THESEUS *and* AMPHITRYON *are chanted responsively.*)

AMPHITRYON

O king, whose home is that olive-clad hill!

THESEUS

Why this piteous prelude in addressing me?

AMPHITRYON

Heaven has afflicted us with grievous suffering.

THESEUS

Whose be these children, o'er whom thou weepest?

AMPHITRYON

My own son's children, woe to him! their father and butcher both was he, hardening his heart to the bloody deed.

THESEUS

Hush! good words only!

AMPHITRYON

I would I could obey!

THESEUS

What dreadful words!

AMPHITRYON

Fortune has spread her wings, and we are ruined, ruined.

THESEUS

What meanest thou? what hath he done?

AMPHITRYON

Slain them in a wild fit of frenzy with arrows dipped in the venom of the hundred-headed hydra.

THESEUS

This is Hera's work; but who lies there among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRYON

My son, my own enduring son, that marched with gods to Phlegra's plain, there to battle with giants and slay them, warrior that he was.

THESEUS

Ah, woe for him! whose fortune was e'er so curst as his?

AMPHITRYON

Never wilt thou find another that hath borne a larger share of suffering or been more fatally deceived.

THESEUS

Why doth he veil his head, poor wretch, in his robe?

AMPHITRYON

He is ashamed to meet thine eye; his kinsman's kind intent and his children's blood make him abashed.

THESEUS

But I come to sympathize; uncover him.

AMPHITRYON

My son, remove that mantle from thine eyes, throw it from thee, show thy face unto the sun; a counterpoise to weeping is battling for the mastery. In suppliant wise I entreat thee, as I grasp thy

beard, thy knees, thy hands, and let fall the tear from my old eyes. O my child! restrain thy savage lion-like temper, for thou art rushing forth on an unholy course of bloodshed, eager to join woe to woe.

THESEUS

Ho! To thee I call who art huddled there in thy misery, show to they friends thy face; for no darkness is black enough to hide thy sad mischance. Why dost thou wave thy hand at me, signifying murder? is it that I may not be polluted by speaking with thee? If I share thy misfortune, what is that to me? For if I too had luck in days gone by, I must refer it to the time when thou didst bring me safe from the dead to the light of life. I hate a friend whose gratitude grows old; one who is ready to enjoy his friends' prosperity but unwilling to sail in the same ship with them when their fortune lours. Arise, unveil thy head, poor wretch! and look on me. The gallant soul endures without a word such blows as heaven deals.

HERACLES

O Theseus, didst thou witness this struggle with my children?

THESEUS

I heard of it, and now I see the horrors thou meanest.

HERACLES

Why then hast thou unveiled my head to the sun?

THESEUS

Why have I? Thou, a man, canst not pollute what is of God.

HERACLES

Fly, luckless wretch, from my unholy taint.

THESEUS

The avenging fiend goes not forth from friend to friend.

HERACLES

For this I thank thee; I do not regret the service I did thee.

THESEUS

While I, for kindness then received, now show my pity for thee.

HERACLES

Ah yes! I am piteous, a murderer of my sons.

THESEUS

I weep for thee in thy changed fortunes.

HERACLES
Didst ever find another more afflicted?

THESEUS
Thy misfortunes reach from earth to heaven.

HERACLES
Therefore am I resolved on death.

THESEUS
Dost thou suppose the gods attend to these thy threats?

HERACLES
Remorseless hath heaven been to me; so I will prove the like to it.

THESEUS
Hush! lest thy presumption add to thy sufferings.

HERACLES
My barque is freighted full with sorrow; there is no room to stow aught further.

THESEUS
What wilt thou do? whither is thy fury drifting thee?

HERACLES
I will die and return to that world below whence I have just come.

THESEUS
Such language is fit for any common fellow.

HERACLES
Ah! thine is the advice of one outside sorrow's pale.

THESEUS
Are these indeed the words of Heracles, the much-enduring?

HERACLES
Though never so much as this. Endurance must have a limit.

THESEUS
Is this man's benefactor, his chiefest friend?

HERACLES
Man brings no help to me; no! Hera has her way.

THESEUS
Never will Hellas suffer thee to die through sheer perversity.

HERACLES

Hear me a moment, that I may enter the lists with words in answer to thy admonitions; and I will unfold to thee why life now as well as formerly has been unbearable to me. First I am the son of a man who incurred the guilt of blood, before he married my mother Alcmena, by slaying her aged sire. Now when the foundation is badly laid at birth, needs must the race be cursed with woe; and Zeus, whoever this Zeus may be, begot me as a butt for Hera's hate; yet be not thou vexed thereat, old man; for thee rather than Zeus do I regard as my father. Then whilst I was yet being suckled, that bride of Zeus did foist into my cradle fearsome snakes to compass my death. After I was grown to man's estate, of all the toils I then endured what need to tell? of all the lions, Typhons triple-bodied, and giants that I slew; or of the battle I won against the hosts of four-legged Centaurs? or how when I had killed the hydra, that monster with a ring of heads with power to grow again, I passed through countless other toils besides and came unto the dead to fetch to the light at the bidding of Eurystheus the three-headed hound, hell's porter. Last, ah, woe is me! have I perpetrated this bloody deed to crown the sorrows of my house with my children's murder. To this sore strait am I come; no longer may I dwell in Thebes, the city that I love; for suppose I stay, to what temple or gathering of friends shall I repair? For mine is no curse that invites address. Shall I to Argos? how can I, when I am an exile from my country? Well, is there a single other city I can fly to? And if there were, am I to be looked at askance as a marked man, branded by cruel stabbing tongues, "Is not this the son of Zeus that once murdered wife and children? Plague take him from the land!"

Now to one who was erst called happy, such changes are a grievous thing; though he who is always unfortunate feels no such pain, for sorrow is his birthright. This, methinks, is the piteous pass I shall one day come to; for earth will cry out forbidding me to touch her, the sea and the river-springs will refuse me a crossing, and I shall become like Ixion who revolves in chains upon that wheel. Wherefore this is best, that henceforth I be seen by none of the Hellenes, amongst whom in happier days I lived in bliss. What right have I to live? what profit can I have in the possession of a useless, impious life? So let that noble wife of Zeus break forth in dancing, beating with buskined foot on heaven's bright floor; for now hath she worked her heart's desire in utterly confounding the chiefest of Hellas' sons. Who would pray to such a goddess? Her jealousy of Zeus for his love of a woman hath destroyed the benefactors of Hellas, guiltless though they were.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

This is the work of none other of the gods than the wife of Zeus; thou art right in that surmise.

THESEUS

I cannot counsel you to die [3] rather than to go on suffering. There is not a man alive that hath wholly 'scaped misfortune's taint, nor any god either, if what poets sing is true. Have they not intermarried in ways that law forbids? Have they not thrown fathers into ignominious chains to gain the sovereign power? Still they inhabit Olympus and brave the issue of their crimes. And yet what shalt thou say in thy defence, if thou, a child of man, dost kick against the pricks of fate, while they do not? Nay, then, leave Thebes in compliance with the law, and come with me to the city of Pallas. There, when I have purified thee of thy pollution, will I give thee temples and the half of all I have. Yea, I will give thee all those presents I received from the citizens for saving their children, seven sons and daughters seven, in the day I slew the bull of Crete; [4] for I have plots of land assigned me throughout the country; these shall henceforth be called after thee by men, whilst thou livest; and at thy death, when thou art gone to Hades' halls, the city of Athens shall unite in exalting thy honour with sacrifices and a monument of stone. For 'tis a noble crown for citizens to win from Hellas, even a reputation fair, by helping a man of worth. This is the return that I will make thee for saving me, for now art thou in need of friends. But when heaven delights to honour a man, he has no need of friends; for the god's aid, when he chooses to give it, is enough.

HERACLES

Alas! this is quite beside the question of my troubles. For my part, I do not believe that the gods indulge in unholy unions; and as for putting fetters on parents' hands, I have never thought that worthy of belief, nor will I now be so persuaded, nor again that one god is naturally lord and master of another. For the deity, if he be really such, has no wants; these are miserable fictions of the poets. But I, for all my piteous plight, reflected whether I should let myself be branded as a coward for giving up my life. For whoso schooleth not his frail mortal nature to bear fate's buffets as he ought, will never be able to withstand even a man's weapon. I will harden my heart against death and seek thy city, with grateful thanks for all thou offerest me.

(*He weeps.*)

Of countless troubles have I tasted, God knows, but never yet did I faint at any or shed a single tear; nay, nor ever dreamt that I should come to this, to let the tear-drop fall. But now, it seems, I must be fortune's slave. Well, let it pass; old father mine, thou seest me go forth to

exile, and in me beholdest my own children's murderer. Give them burial, and lay them out in death with the tribute of a tear, for the law forbids my doing so. Rest their heads upon their mother's bosom and fold them in her arms, sad pledges of our union, whom I, alas! unwittingly did slay. And when thou hast buried these dead, live on here still, in bitterness maybe, but still constrain thy soul to share my sorrows. O children! he who begat you, your own father, hath been your destroyer, and ye have had no profit of my triumphs, all my restless toil to win you a fair name in life, a glorious guerdon from a sire. Thee too, unhappy wife, this hand hath slain, a poor return to make thee for preserving mine honour so safe, for all the weary watch thou long hast kept within my house. Alas for you, my wife, my sons! and woe for me, how sad my lot, cut off from wife and child! Ah! these kisses, bitter-sweet! these weapons which 'tis pain to own! I am not sure whether to keep or let them go; dangling at my side they thus will say, "With us didst thou destroy children and wife; we are thy children's slayers, and thou keepest us." Shall I carry them after that? what answer can I make? Yet, am I to strip me of these weapons, the comrades of my glorious career in Hellas, and put myself thereby in the power of my foes, to die a death of shame? No! I must not let them go, but keep them, though it grieve me. In one thing, Theseus, help my misery; come to Argos with me and aid in settling my reward for bringing Cerberus thither; lest, if I go all alone, my sorrow for my sons do me some hurt.

O land of Cadmus, and all ye folk of Thebes! cut off your hair, and mourn with me; go to my children's burial, and with united dirge lament alike the dead and me; for on all of us hath Hera inflicted the same cruel blow of destruction.

THESEUS

Rise, unhappy man! thou hast had thy fill of tears.

HERACLES

I cannot rise; my limbs are rooted here.

THESEUS

Yea, even the strong are o'erthrown by misfortunes.

HERACLES

Ah! would I could grow into a stone upon this spot, oblivious of trouble!

THESEUS

Peace! give thy hand to a friend and helper.

HERACLES

Nay, let me not wipe off the blood upon thy robe.

THESEUS

Wipe it off and spare not; I will not say thee nay.

HERACLES

Reft of my own sons, I find thee as a son to me.

THESEUS

Throw thy arm about my neck; I will be thy guide.

HERACLES

A pair of friends in sooth are we, but one a man of sorrows. Ah! aged sire, this is the kind of man to make a friend.

AMPHITRYON

Blest in her sons, the country that gave him birth!

HERACLES

O Theseus, turn me back again to see my babes.

THESEUS

What charm dost think to find in this to soothe thy soul?

HERACLES

I long to do so, and would fain embrace my sire.

AMPHITRYON

Here am I, my son; thy wish is no less dear to me.

THESEUS

Hast thou so short a memory for thy troubles?

HERACLES

All that I endured of yore was easier to bear than this.

THESEUS

If men see thee play the woman, they will scoff.

HERACLES

Have I by living grown so abject in *thy* sight? 'twas not so once, methinks.

THESEUS

Aye, too much so; for how dost show thyself the glorious Heracles of yore?

HERACLES

What about thyself? what kind of hero wert thou when in trouble in the world below?

THESEUS

I was worse than anyone as far as courage went.

HERACLES

How then canst thou say of me, that I am abased by my troubles?

THESEUS

Forward!

HERACLES

Farewell, my aged sire!

AMPHITRYON

Farewell to thee, my son!

HERACLES

Bury my children as I said.

AMPHITRYON

But who will bury me, my son?

HERACLES

I will.

AMPHITRYON

When wilt thou come?

HERACLES

After thou hast buried my children.

AMPHITRYON

How?

HERACLES

I will fetch thee from Thebes to Athens. But carry my children within, a grievous burden to the earth. And I, after ruining my house by deeds of shame, will follow in the wake of Theseus, totally destroyed. Whoso prefers wealth or might to the possession of good friends, thinketh amiss.

(THESEUS *and his attendants lead* HERACLES *away.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

With grief and many a bitter tear we go our way, robbed of all we prized most dearly.

NOTE FOR HERACLES

COLERIDGE's translation has been slightly altered in the following lines: 63, 89, 138, 152, 204–205, 300, 362, 393, 421, 596, 627, 728, 732, 847, 917, 932, 1012, 1057, 1065, 1069, 1075, 1089, 1107, 1163, 1173, 1182, 1213, 1214, 1237, 1255, 1340, 1343, 1424.

1. The reference is to the Eleusinian mysteries. Privileges in Hades were guaranteed to initiates.

2. The allusion is to Itys, whose murder by his mother, as Coleridge points out, became a theme for poets, and hence was an offering to the Muses.

3. Some words seem to have been lost here. The beginning of the sentence has been supplied to establish the connection in thought. Cf. note *ad loc.* in the text of Paley.

4. *i.e.*, the Minotaur.

X

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

Characters in the Play

Iphigenia, *daughter of Agamemnon*
Orestes, *brother of* Iphigenia
Pylades, *friend of* Orestes
Thoas, *King of the Taurians*
Herdsman
Messenger
Minerva
Chorus of Greek Women, *captives, attendants on* Iphigenia *in the temple*

INTRODUCTION

LACK of both external and internal evidence makes it impossible to date the *Iphigenia in Tauris,* though from its general tone approximately 420 B.C. seems a reasonable time for its composition. As is usual in a great many Euripidean plays, there is an element of aetiology present. Apparently a local religious festival in Attica, to which Euripides alludes in lines 1450 ff., attracted the poet's attention, and hence he connected his interpretation of the familiar legend of Iphigenia with certain features of contemporary religious ritual. Euripides, by using this device, perhaps may have given his play greater immediacy in the eyes of his Athenian audience, but he has not rendered the aetiological factor as relevant to the central nature of his piece, as Aeschylus has, for example, in *The Eumenides,* when he deals with the court of the Areopagus.

Some critics have felt that Euripides sought escape from the discouraging and disillusioning events of his times by composing what they would call "romantic" plays. In many ways this contention seems valid and it applies with particular cogency to the *Iphigenia in Tauris.* Here we meet a drama of excitement and adventure in which the protagonists extricate themselves successfully and triumphantly from a seemingly fatal situation. The prologue reveals that Euripides has adopted for his play the variant legend which recorded that Iphigenia had not actually been killed at Aulis. Her father, Agamemnon, in guilty obedience to the prophecy of Calchas, had brought her to Aulis to sacrifice her to Artemis (or Diana, as the translator of this play calls her) in order that the great expedition might sail for Troy. At the last moment Artemis substituted a hind for the maiden at the altar, and carried her far away to the land of the Taurians. Here under the orders of their king Thoas, she now serves as a priestess of the goddess, part of whose barbaric rite demands that all strangers who come to the land must be slain in religious sacrifice. The tense dramatic situation commences with the appearance of Iphigenia's brother, Orestes, and his friend Pylades, who are of course in the category of potential victims of the rite.

Euripides has presented two excellent characterizations in the play. Orestes is drawn as one whose former deeds have left upon him an in-

delible stain,—the "Furies" of his murdered mother still can shake his mental stability. He possesses great courage and, when in possession of himself, great clarity of mind, yet at the same time he leans heavily and somewhat pathetically upon his loyal friend, Pylades. Iphigenia likewise commands attention. She is still filled with bitterness because the Greeks would have sacrificed her at Aulis, but nevertheless she still loves Greece and longs desperately to return to her native land. She too possesses great courage, and manages coolly to carry out the plan whereby she may safely effect the flight of herself, her brother, and his friend. Some literal-minded interpreters have objected because she outwits Thoas by means of gross deception. The fact that the play in its central nature is melodramatically "romantic" tends to render such criticism irrelevant.

The drama on the whole is well constructed, even though Athena's appearance as a *deus ex machina* seems to be unsatisfactorily motivated. Aristotle thought well of at least one feature of the play, for he singled out the recognition scene between Iphigenia and Orestes to illustrate the best way in which this aspect of drama could be handled.[1] So far as the general significance of the play is concerned, there have been attempts to establish a definite religious orientation. This element seems only to be present in a secondary degree, for our attention cannot fail to be captured primarily by the desperate situation in which Iphigenia, Orestes, and Pylades find themselves and by the excitement of their escape.

[1] Aristotle, *Poetics*, chap. XVI.

IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS

(SCENE:—*Before the great temple of Diana of the Taurians. A blood-stained altar is prominently in view.* IPHIGENIA, *clad as a priestess, enters from the temple.*)

IPHIGENIA

To PISA, by the fleetest coursers borne,
Comes Pelops, son of Tantalus, and weds
The virgin daughter of Oenomaus:
From her sprung Atreus; Menelaus from him,
And Agamemnon; I from him derive
My birth, his Iphigenia, by his queen,
Daughter of Tyndarus. Where frequent winds
Swell the vex'd Euripus with eddying blasts,
And roll the darkening waves, my father slew me,
A victim to Diana, so he thought,
For Helen's sake, its bay where Aulis winds,
To fame well known; for there his thousand ships,
The armament of Greece, the imperial chief
Convened, desirous that his Greeks should snatch
The glorious crown of victory from Troy,
And punish the base insult to the bed
Of Helen, vengeance grateful to the soul
Of Menelaus. But 'gainst his ships the sea
Long barr'd, and not one favouring breeze to swell
His flagging sails, the hallow'd flames the chief
Consults, and Calchas thus disclosed the fates:—
"Imperial leader of the Grecian host,
Hence shalt thou not unmoor thy vessels, ere
Diana as a victim shall receive
Thy daughter Iphigenia: what the year
Most beauteous should produce, thou to the queen
Dispensing light didst vow to sacrifice:
A daughter Clytemnestra in thy house

Then bore (the peerless grace of beauty thus
To me assigning); her must thou devote
The victim." Then Ulysses by his arts,
Me, to Achilles as design'd a bride,
Won from my mother. My unhappy fate
To Aulis brought me; on the altar there
High was I placed, and o'er me gleam'd the sword,
Aiming the fatal wound: but from the stroke
Diana snatch'd me, in exchange a hind
Giving the Grecians; through the lucid air
Me she conveyed to Tauris, here to dwell,
Where o'er barbarians a barbaric king
Holds his rude sway, named Thoas, whose swift foot
Equals the rapid wing: me he appoints
The priestess of this temple, where such rites
Are pleasing to Diana, that the name
Alone claims honour; for I sacrifice
(Such, ere I came, the custom of the state)
Whatever Grecian to this savage shore
Is driven: the previous rites are mine; the deed
Of blood, too horrid to be told, devolves
On others in the temple: but the rest,
In reverence to the goddess, I forbear.
But the strange visions which the night now past
Brought with it, to the air, if that may soothe
My troubled thought, I will relate. I seem'd,
As I lay sleeping, from this land removed,
To dwell at Argos, resting on my couch
Mid the apartments of the virgin train.
Sudden the firm earth shook: I fled, and stood
Without; the battlements I saw, and all
The rocking roof fall from its lofty height
In ruins to the ground: of all the house,
My father's house, one pillar, as I thought,
Alone was left, which from its cornice waved
A length of auburn locks, and human voice
Assumed: the bloody office, which is mine
To strangers here, respecting, I to death,
Sprinkling the lustral drops, devoted it
With many tears. My dream I thus expound:—
Orestes, whom I hallow'd by my rites,
Is dead: for sons are pillars of the house;
They, whom my lustral lavers sprinkle, die.

I cannot to my friends apply my dream,
For Strophius, when I perish'd, had no son.
Now, to my brother, absent though he be,
Libations will I offer: this, at least,
With the attendants given me by the king,
Virgins of Greece, I can: but what the cause
They yet attend me not within the house,
The temple of the goddess, where I dwell?
(*She goes into the temple.* ORESTES *and* PYLADES *enter cautiously.*)

ORESTES

Keep careful watch, lest some one come this way.

PYLADES

I watch, and turn mine eye to every part.

ORESTES

And dost thou, Pylades, imagine this
The temple of the goddess, which we seek,
Our sails from Argos sweeping o'er the main?

PYLADES

Orestes, such my thought, and must be thine.

ORESTES

And this the altar wet with Grecian blood?

PYLADES

Crimson'd with gore behold its sculptured wreaths.

ORESTES

See, from the battlements what trophies hang!

PYLADES

The spoils of strangers that have here been slain.

ORESTES

Behooves us then to watch with careful eye.
O Phoebus, by thy oracles again
Why hast thou led me to these toils? E'er since,
In vengeance for my father's blood, I slew
My mother, ceaseless by the Furies driven,
Vagrant, an outcast, many a bending course
My feet have trod: to thee I came, of thee
Inquired this whirling frenzy by what means,

And by what means my labours I might end.
Thy voice commanded me to speed my course
To this wild coast of Tauris, where a shrine
Thy sister hath, Diana; thence to take
The statue of the goddess, which from heaven
(So say the natives) to this temple fell:
This image, or by fraud or fortune won,
The dangerous toil achieved, to place the prize
In the Athenian land: no more was said;
But that, performing this, I should obtain
Rest from my toils. Obedient to thy words,
On this unknown, inhospitable coast
Am I arrived. Now, Pylades (for thou
Art my associate in this dangerous task),
Of thee I ask, What shall we do? for high
The walls, thou seest, which fence the temple round.
Shall we ascend their height? But how escape
Observing eyes? Or burst the brazen bars?
Of these we nothing know: in the attempt
To force the gates, or meditating means
To enter, if detected, we shall die.
Shall we then, ere we die, by flight regain
The ship in which we hither plough'd the sea?

PYLADES

Of flight we brook no thought, nor such hath been
Our wont; nor may the god's commanding voice
Be disobey'd; but from the temple now
Retiring, in some cave, which the black sea
Beats with its billows, we may lie conceal'd
At distance from our bark, lest some, whose eyes
May note it, bear the tidings to the king,
And we be seized by force. But when the eye
Of night comes darkling on, then must we dare,
And take the polish'd image from the shrine,
Attempting all things: and the vacant space
Between the triglyphs (mark it well) enough
Is open to admit us; by that way
Attempt we to descend: in toils the brave
Are daring; of no worth the abject soul.

ORESTES

This length of sea we plough'd not, from this coast,
Nothing effected, to return: but well

Hast thou advised; the god must be obey'd.
Retire we then where we may lie conceal'd;
For never from the god will come the cause,
That what his sacred voice commands should fall
Effectless. We must dare. No toil to youth
Excuse, which justifies inaction, brings.

(*They go out.* IPHIGENIA *and the* CHORUS *enter from the temple.*)

IPHIGENIA (*singing*)[1]

You, who your savage dwellings hold
Nigh this inhospitable main,
'Gainst clashing rocks with fury roll'd,
From all but hallow'd words abstain.
Virgin queen, Latona's grace,
Joying in the mountain chase,
To thy court, thy rich domain,
To thy beauteous-pillar'd fane
Where our wondering eyes behold
Battlements that blaze with gold,
Thus my virgin steps I bend,
Holy, the holy to attend;
Servant, virgin queen, to thee;
Power, who bear'st life's golden key,
Far from Greece for steeds renown'd,
From her walls with towers crown'd,
From the beauteous-planted meads
Where his train Eurotas leads,
Visiting the loved retreats,
Once my father's royal seats.

CHORUS (*singing*)

I come. What cares disturb thy rest?
Why hast thou brought me to the shrine?
Doth some fresh grief afflict thy breast?
Why bring me to this seat divine?
Thou daughter of that chief, whose powers
Plough'd with a thousand keels the strand,
And ranged in arms shook Troy's proud towers
Beneath the Atreidae's great command!

IPHIGENIA (*singing*)

O ye attendant train,
How is my heart oppress'd with wo!
What notes, save notes of grief, can flow,
A harsh and unmelodious strain?
My soul domestic ills oppress with dread,
And bid me mourn a brother dead.
What visions did my sleeping sense appal
In the past dark and midnight hour!
'Tis ruin, ruin all.
My father's house,—it is no more:
No more is his illustrious line.
What dreadful deeds hath Argos known!
One only brother, Fate, was mine;
And dost thou rend him from me? Is he gone
To Pluto's dreary realms below?
For him, as dead, with pious care
This goblet I prepare;
And on the bosom of the earth shall flow
Streams from the heifer mountain-bred,
The grape's rich juice, and, mix'd with these,
The labour of the yellow bees,
Libations soothing to the dead.
Give me the oblation: let me hold
The foaming goblet's hallow'd gold.

O thou, the earth beneath,
Who didst from Agamemnon spring;
To thee, deprived of vital breath,
I these libations bring.
Accept them: to thy honour'd tomb,
Never, ah! never shall I come;
Never these golden tresses bear,
To place them there, there shed the tear;
For from my country far, a hind
There deem'd as slain, my wild abode I find.

CHORUS (*singing*)

To thee thy faithful train
The Asiatic hymn will raise,
A doleful, a barbaric strain,
Responsive to thy lays,
And steep in tears the mournful song,—

Notes, which to the dead belong;
Dismal notes, attuned to woe
By Pluto in the realms below:
No sprightly air shall we employ
To cheer the soul, and wake the sense of joy.

IPHIGENIA (*singing*)

The Atreidae are no more;
Extinct their sceptre's golden light;
My father's house from its proud height
Is fallen: its ruins I deplore.
Who of her kings at Argos holds his reign,
Her kings once bless'd? But Sorrow's train
Rolls on impetuous for the rapid steeds
Which o'er the strand with Pelops fly.
From what atrocious deeds
Starts the sun back, his sacred eye
Of brightness, loathing, turn'd aside?
And fatal to their house arose,
From the rich ram, Thessalia's golden pride,
Slaughter on slaughter, woes on woes:
Thence, from the dead ages past,
Vengeance came rushing on its prey,
And swept the race of Tantalus away.
Fatal to thee its ruthless haste;
To me too fatal, from the hour
My mother wedded, from the night
She gave me to life's opening light,
Nursed by affliction's cruel power.
Early to me, the Fates unkind,
To know what sorrow is assign'd:
Me Leda's daughter, hapless dame,
First blooming offspring of her bed
(A father's conduct here I blame),
A joyless victim bred;
When o'er the strand of Aulis, in the pride
Of beauty kindling flames of love,
High on my splendid car I move,
Betrothed to Thetis' son a bride:
Ah, hapless bride, to all the train
Of Grecian fair preferr'd in vain!
But now, a stranger on this strand,
'Gainst which the wild waves beat,

I hold my dreary, joyless seat,
Far distant from my native land,
Nor nuptial bed is mine, nor child, nor friend.
At Argos now no more I raise
The festal song in Juno's praise;
Nor o'er the loom sweet-sounding bend,
As the creative shuttle flies;
Give forms of Titans fierce to rise;
And, dreadful with her purple spear,
Image Athenian Pallas there:
But on this barbarous shore
The unhappy stranger's fate I moan,
The ruthless altar stain'd with gore,
His deep and dying groan;
And, for each tear that weeps his woes,
From me a tear of pity flows.
Of these the sad remembrance now must sleep:
A brother dead, ah me! I weep:
At Argos him, by fate oppress'd,
I left an infant at the breast,
A beauteous bud, whose opening charms
Then blossom'd in his mother's arms;
Orestes, born to high command,
The imperial sceptre of the Argive land.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Leaving the sea-wash'd shore a herdsman comes
Speeding, with some fresh tidings to thee fraught.
(*A* HERDSMAN *enters.*)

HERDSMAN

Daughter of Agamemnon, and bright gem
Of Clytemnestra, hear strange things from me.

IPHIGENIA

And what of terror doth thy tale import?

HERDSMAN

Two youths, swift-rowing 'twixt the clashing rocks
Of our wild sea, are landed on the beach,
A grateful offering at Diana's shrine,
And victims to the goddess. Haste, prepare
The sacred lavers, and the previous rites.

IPHIGENIA
Whence are the strangers? from what country named?

HERDSMAN
From Greece: this only, nothing more, I know.

IPHIGENIA
Didst thou not hear what names the strangers bear?

HERDSMAN
One by the other was call'd Pylades.

IPHIGENIA
How is the stranger, his companion, named?

HERDSMAN
This none of us can tell: we heard it not.

IPHIGENIA
How saw you them? how seized them? by what chance?

HERDSMAN
Mid the rude cliffs that o'er the Euxine hang—

IPHIGENIA
And what concern have herdsmen with the sea?

HERDSMAN
To wash our herds in the salt wave we came.

IPHIGENIA
To what I ask'd return: how seized you them?
Tell me the manner; this I wish to know:
For slow the victims come, nor hath some while
The altar of the goddess, as was wont,
Been crimson'd with the streams of Grecian blood.

HERDSMAN
Our herds, which in the forest feed, we drove
Amid the tide that rushes to the shore,
'Twixt the Symplegades: it was the place,
Where in the rifted rock the chafing surge
Hath hallow'd a rude cave, the haunt of those
Whose quest is purple. Of our number there
A herdsman saw two youths, and back return'd
With soft and silent step; then pointing, said,
"Do you not see them? These are deities

That sit there." One, who with religious awe
Revered the gods, with hands uplifted pray'd,
His eyes fix'd on them,—"Son of the sea-nymph
Leucothoe, guardian of the labouring bark,
Our lord Palaemon, be propitious to us!
Or sit you on our shores, bright sons of Jove,
Castor and Pollux? Or the glorious boast
Of Nereus, father of the noble choir
Of fifty Nereids?" One, whose untaught mind
Audacious folly harden'd 'gainst the sense
Of holy awe, scoff'd at his prayers, and said,—
"These are wreck'd mariners, that take their seat
In the cleft rock through fear, as they have heard
Our prescribed rite, that here we sacrifice
The stranger." To the greater part he seem'd
Well to have spoken, and we judged it meet
To seize the victims, by our country's law
Due to the goddess. Of the stranger youths,
One at this instant started from the rock:
Awhile he stood, and wildly toss'd his head,
And groan'd, his loose arms trembling all their length,
Convulsed with madness; and a hunter loud
Then cried,—"Dost thou behold her, Pylades?
Dost thou not see this dragon fierce from hell
Rushing to kill me, and against me rousing
Her horrid vipers? See this other here,
Emitting fire and slaughter from her vests,
Sails on her wings, my mother in her arms
Bearing, to hurl this mass of rock upon me!
Ah, she will kill me! Whither shall I fly?"
His visage might we see no more the same,
And his voice varied; now the roar of bulls,
The howl of dogs now uttering, mimic sounds
Sent by the maddening Furies, as they say.
Together thronging, as of death assured,
We sit in silence; but he drew his sword,
And, like a lion rushing mid our herds,
Plunged in their sides the weapon, weening thus
To drive the Furies, till the briny wave
Foam'd with their blood. But when among our herds
We saw this havoc made, we all 'gan rouse
To arms, and blew our sounding shells to alarm
The neighbouring peasants; for we thought in fight

Rude herdsmen to these youthful strangers, train'd
To arms, ill match'd; and forthwith to our aid
Flock'd numbers. But, his frenzy of its force
Abating, on the earth the stranger falls,
Foam bursting from his mouth: but when he saw
The advantage, each adventured on and hurl'd
What might annoy him fallen: the other youth
Wiped off the foam, took of his person care,
His fine-wrought robe spread over him; with heed
The flying stones observing, warded off
The wounds, and each kind office to his friend
Attentively perform'd. His sense return'd;
The stranger started up, and soon perceived
The tide of foes that roll'd impetuous on,
The danger and distress that closed them round.
He heaved a sigh; an unremitting storm
Of stones we pour'd, and each incited each:
Then we his dreadful exhortation heard:—
"Pylades, we shall die; but let us die
With glory: draw thy sword, and follow me."
But when we saw the enemies advance
With brandish'd swords, the steep heights crown'd with wood
We fell in flight: but others, if one flies,
Press on them; if again they drive these back,
What before fled turns, with a storm of stones
Assaulting them; but, what exceeds belief,
Hurl'd by a thousand hands, not one could hit
The victims of the goddess: scarce at length,
Not by brave daring seized we them, but round
We closed upon them, and their swords with stones
Beat, wily, from their hands; for on their knees
They through fatigue had sunk upon the ground:
We bare them to the monarch of this land:
He view'd them, and without delay to thee
Sent them devoted to the cleansing vase,
And to the altar. Victims such as these,
O virgin, wish to find; for if such youths
Thou offer, for thy slaughter Greece will pay,
Her wrongs to thee at Aulis well avenged.

LEADER

These things are wonderful, which thou hast told
Of him, whoe'er he be, the youth from Greece
Arrived on this inhospitable shore.

IPHIGENIA

'Tis well: go thou, and bring the strangers hither:
What here is to be done shall be our care.
(*The* HERDSMAN *departs.*)
O my unhappy heart! before this hour
To strangers thou wast gentle, always touch'd
With pity, and with tears their tears repaid,
When Grecians, natives of my country, came
Into my hands: but from the dreams, which prompt
To deeds ungentle, showing that no more
Orestes views the sun's fair light, whoe'er
Ye are that hither come, me will you find
Relentless now. This is the truth, my friends:
My heart is rent; and never will the wretch,
Who feels affliction's cruel tortures, bear
Good-will to those that are more fortunate.
Never came gale from Jove, nor flying bark,
Which 'twixt the dangerous rocks of the Euxine sea
Brought Helen hither, who my ruin wrought,
Nor Menelaus; that on them my foul wrongs
I might repay, and with an Aulis here
Requite the Aulis there, where I was seized,
And, as a heifer, by the Grecians slain:
My father too, who gave me birth, was priest.
Ah me! the sad remembrance of those ills
Yet lives: how often did I stroke thy cheek,
And, hanging on thy knees, address thee thus:—
"Alas, my father! I by thee am led
A bride to bridal rites unbless'd and base:
Them, while by thee I bleed, my mother hymns,
And the Argive dames, with hymeneal strains,
And with the jocund pipe the house resounds:
But at the altar I by thee am slain;
For Pluto was the Achilles, not the son
Of Peleus, whom to me thou didst announce
The affianced bridegroom, and by guile didst bring
To bloody nuptials in the rolling car."
But, o'er mine eyes the veil's fine texture spread,
This brother in my hands who now is lost,
I clasp'd not, though his sister; did not press
My lips to his, through virgin modesty,
As going to the house of Peleus: then
Each fond embrace I to another time

Deferr'd, as soon to Argos to return.
If, O unhappy brother, thou art dead,
From what a state, thy father's envied height
Of glory, loved Orestes, art thou torn!—
These false rules of the goddess much I blame: [2]
Whoe'er of mortals is with slaughter stain'd,
Or hath at childbirth given assisting hands,
Or chanced to touch aught dead, she as impure
Drives from her altars; yet herself delights
In human victims bleeding at her shrine.
Ne'er did Latona from the embrace of Jove
Bring forth such inconsistence: I then deem
The feast of Tantalus, where gods were guests,
Unworthy of belief, as that they fed
On his son's flesh delighted; and I think
These people, who themselves have a wild joy
In shedding human blood, their savage guilt
Charge on the goddess: for this truth I hold;
None of the gods is evil, or doth wrong.

(*She enters the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Ye rocks, ye clashing rocks, whose brow
Frowns o'er the darken'd deeps below;
Whose wild, inhospitable wave,
From Argos flying and her native spring,
The virgin once was known to brave,
Tormented with the brize's maddening sting,
From Europe when the rude sea o'er
She pass'd to Asia's adverse shore;
Who are these hapless youths, that dare to land,
Leaving those soft, irriguous meads,
Where, his green margin fringed with reeds,
Eurotas rolls his ample tide,
Or Dirce's hallow'd waters glide,
And touch this barbarous, stranger-hating strand,
The altars where a virgin dews,
And blood the pillar'd shrine imbrues?

antistrophe 1

Did they with oars impetuous sweep
(Rank answering rank) the foamy deep,
And wing their bark with flying sails,

To raise their humble fortune their desire;
Eager to catch the rising gales,
Their bosoms with the love of gain on fire?
For sweet is hope to man's fond breast;
The hope of gain, insatiate guest,
Though on her oft attends Misfortune's train;
For daring man she tempts to brave
The dangers of the boisterous wave,
And leads him heedless of his fate
Through many a distant barbarous state.
Vain his opinions, his pursuits are vain!
Boundless o'er some her power is shown,
But some her temperate influence own.

strophe 2

How did they pass the dangerous rocks
Clashing with rude, tremendous shocks?
How pass the savage-howling shore,
Where once the unhappy Phineus held his reign,
And sleep affrighted flies its roar,
Steering their rough course o'er this boisterous main,
Form'd in a ring, beneath whose waves
The Nereid train in high arch'd caves
Weave the light dance, and raise the sprightly song,
While, whispering in their swelling sails,
Soft Zephyrs breathe, or southern gales
Piping amid their tackling play,
As their bark ploughs its watery way
Those hoary cliffs, the haunts of birds, along,
To that wild strand, the rapid race
Where once Achilles deign'd to grace?

antistrophe 2

O that from Troy some chance would bear
Leda's loved daughter, fatal fair!
(The royal virgin's vows are mine)
That her bright tresses roll'd in crimson dew,
Her warm blood flowing at this shrine
The altar of the goddess might imbrue;
And Vengeance, righteous to repay
Her former mischiefs, seize her prey!
But with what rapture should I hear his voice,
If one this shore should reach from Greece,
And bid the toils of slavery cease!

Or might I in the hour of rest
With pleasing dreams of Greece be bless'd;
So in my house, my native land rejoice;
In sleep enjoy the pleasing strain
For happiness restored again!

(IPHIGENIA *enters from the temple.*)

IPHIGENIA

But the two youths, their hands fast bound in chains,
The late-seized victims to the goddess, come.
Silence, my friends; for, destined at the shrine
To bleed, the Grecian strangers near approach;
And no false tidings did the herdsman bring.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Goddess revered, if grateful to thy soul
This state presents such sacrifice, accept
The victims, which the custom of this land
Gives thee, but deem'd unholy by the Greeks.

(*Guards lead in* ORESTES *and* PYLADES, *bound.*)

IPHIGENIA

No more; that to the goddess each due rite
Be well perform'd shall be my care. Unchain
The strangers' hands; that, hallow'd as they are,
They may no more be bound.

(*The guards release* ORESTES *and* PYLADES.)

Go you, prepare
Within the temple what the rites require.
Unhappy youths, what mother brought you forth,
Your father who? Your sister, if perchance
Ye have a sister, of what youths deprived?
For brother she shall have no more. Who knows
Whom such misfortunes may attend? For dark
What the gods will creeps on; and none can tell
The ills to come: this fortune from the sight
Obscures. But, O unhappy strangers, say,
Whence came you? Sail'd you long since for this land?
But long will be your absence from your homes,
For ever, in the dreary realms below.

ORESTES

Lady, whoe'er thou art, why for these things
Dost thou lament? why mourn for ills, which soon

Will fall on us? Him I esteem unwise,
Who, when he sees death near, tries to o'ercome
Its terrors with bewailings, without hope
Of safety: ill he adds to ill, and makes
His folly known, yet dies. We must give way
To fortune; therefore mourn not thou for us:
We know, we are acquainted with your rites.

IPHIGENIA

Which of you by the name of Pylades
Is call'd? This first it is my wish to know.

ORESTES

If aught of pleasure that may give thee, he.

IPHIGENIA

A native of what Grecian state, declare.

ORESTES

What profit knowing this wouldst thou obtain?

IPHIGENIA

And are you brothers, of one mother born?

ORESTES

Brothers by friendship, lady, not by birth.

IPHIGENIA

To thee what name was by thy father given?

ORESTES

With just cause I Unhappy might be call'd.

IPHIGENIA

I ask not that; to fortune that ascribe.

ORESTES

Dying unknown, rude scoffs I shall avoid.

IPHIGENIA

Wilt thou refuse? Why are thy thoughts so high?

ORESTES

My body thou mayst kill, but not my name.

IPHIGENIA

Wilt thou not say a native of what state?

ORESTES
The question naught avails, since I must die.

IPHIGENIA
What hinders thee from granting me this grace?

ORESTES
The illustrious Argos I my country boast.

IPHIGENIA
By the gods, stranger, is thy birth from thence?

ORESTES
My birth is from Mycenae, once the bless'd.

IPHIGENIA
Dost thou an exile fly, or by what fate?

ORESTES
Of my free will, in part not free, I fly.

IPHIGENIA
Wilt thou then tell me what I wish to know?

ORESTES
Whate'er is foreign to my private griefs.

IPHIGENIA
To my dear wish from Argos art thou come.

ORESTES
Not to my wish; but if to thine, enjoy it.

IPHIGENIA
Troy, whose fame spreads so wide, perchance thou know'st.

ORESTES
O that I ne'er had known her, ev'n in dreams!

IPHIGENIA
They say she is no more, by war destroy'd.

ORESTES
It is so: you have heard no false reports.

IPHIGENIA
Is Helena with Menelaus return'd?

ORESTES
She is; and one I love her coming rues.

IPHIGENIA
Where is she? Me too she of old hath wrong'd.

ORESTES
At Sparta with her former lord she dwells.

IPHIGENIA
By Greece, and not by me alone abhorr'd!

ORESTES
I from her nuptials have my share of grief.

IPHIGENIA
And are the Greeks, as Fame reports, return'd?

ORESTES
How briefly all things dost thou ask at once!

IPHIGENIA
This favour, ere thou die, I wish to obtain.

ORESTES
Ask, then: since such thy wish, I will inform thee.

IPHIGENIA
Calchas, a prophet,—came he back from Troy?

ORESTES
He perish'd: at Mycenae such the fame.

IPHIGENIA
Goddess revered! But doth Ulysses live?

ORESTES
He lives, they say, but is not yet return'd.

IPHIGENIA
Perish the wretch, nor see his country more!

ORESTES
Wish him not ill, for all with him is ill.

IPHIGENIA
But doth the son of sea-born Thetis live?

ORESTES
He lives not: vain his nuptial rites at Aulis.

IPHIGENIA
That all was fraud, as those who felt it say.

ORESTES
But who art thou, inquiring thus of Greece?

IPHIGENIA
I am from thence, in early youth undone.

ORESTES
Thou hast a right to inquire what there hath pass'd.

IPHIGENIA
What know'st thou of the chief, men call the bless'd?

ORESTES
Who? Of the bless'd was not the chief I knew.

IPHIGENIA
The royal Agamemnon, son of Atreus.

ORESTES
Of him I know not, lady; cease to ask.

IPHIGENIA
Nay, by the gods, tell me, and cheer my soul.

ORESTES
He's dead, the unhappy chief: no single ill.

IPHIGENIA
Dead! By what adverse fate? O wretched me!

ORESTES
Why mourn for this? How doth it touch thy breast?

IPHIGENIA
The glories of his former state I mourn.

ORESTES
Dreadfully murdered by a woman's hand.

IPHIGENIA
How wretched she that slew him, he thus slain!

ORESTES
Now then forbear: of him inquire no more.

IPHIGENIA
This only: lives the unhappy monarch's wife?

ORESTES
She, lady, is no more, slain by her son.

IPHIGENIA
Alas, the ruin'd house! What his intent?

ORESTES
To avenge on her his noble father slain.

IPHIGENIA
An ill, but righteous deed, how justly done!

ORESTES
Though righteous, by the gods he is not bless'd.

IPHIGENIA
Hath Agamemnon other offspring left?

ORESTES
He left one virgin daughter, named Electra.

IPHIGENIA
Of her that died a victim is aught said?

ORESTES
This only, dead, she sees the light no more.

IPHIGENIA
Unhappy she! the father too who slew her!

ORESTES
For a bad woman she unseemly died.

IPHIGENIA
At Argos lives the murdered father's son?

ORESTES
Nowhere he lives, poor wretch! and everywhere.

IPHIGENIA
False dreams, farewell; for nothing you import.

ORESTES

Nor are those gods, that have the name of wise,
Less false than fleeting dreams. In things divine,
And in things human, great confusion reigns.
One thing is left; that, not unwise of soul,
Obedient to the prophet's voice he perish'd;
For that he perish'd, they who know report.

LEADER

What shall we know, what of our parents know?
If yet they live or not, who can inform us?

IPHIGENIA

Hear me: this converse prompts a thought, which gives
Promise of good, ye youths of Greece, to you,
To these, and me: thus may it well be done,
If, willing to my purpose, all assent.
Wilt thou, if I shall save thee, go for me
A messenger to Argos, to my friends
Charged with a letter, which a captive wrote,
Who pitied me, nor murderous thought my hand,
But that he died beneath the law, these rites
The goddess deeming just? for from that hour
I have not found who might to Argos bear
Himself my message, back with life return'd,
Or send to any of my friends my letter.
Thou, therefore, since it seems thou dost not bear
Ill-will to me, and dost Mycenae know,
And those I wish to address, be safe, and live,
No base reward for a light letter, life
Receiving; and let him, since thus the state
Requires, without thee to the goddess bleed.

ORESTES

Virgin unknown, well hast thou said in all
Save this, that to the goddess he should bleed
A victim; that were heavy grief indeed.
I steer'd the vessel to these ills; he sail'd
Attendant on my toils: to gain thy grace
By his destruction, and withdraw myself
From sufferings, were unjust: thus let it be:
Give him the letter; to fulfil thy wish,
To Argos he will bear it: me let him
Who claims that office, slay: base is his soul,

Who in calamities involves his friends,
And saves himself; this is a friend, whose life,
Dear to me as my own, I would preserve.

IPHIGENIA

Excellent spirit! from some noble root
It shows thee sprung, and to thy friends a friend
Sincere; of those that share my blood if one
Remains, such may he be! for I am not
Without a brother, strangers, from my sight
Though distant now. Since then thy wish is such,
Him will I send to Argos; he shall bear
My letter; thou shalt die; for this desire
Hath strong possession of thy noble soul.

ORESTES

Who then shall do the dreadful deed, and slay me?

IPHIGENIA

I: to atone the goddess is my charge.

ORESTES

A charge unenvied, virgin, and unbless'd.

IPHIGENIA

Necessity constrains: I must obey.

ORESTES

Wilt thou, a woman, plunge the sword in men?

IPHIGENIA

No: but thy locks to sprinkle round is mine.

ORESTES

Whose then, if I may ask, the bloody deed?

IPHIGENIA

To some within the temple this belongs.

ORESTES

What tomb is destined to receive my corse?

IPHIGENIA

The hallow'd fire within, and a dark cave.

ORESTES

O, that a sister's hand might wrap these limbs!

IPHIGENIA

Vain wish, unhappy youth, whoe'er thou art,
Hast thou conceived; for from this barbarous land
Far is her dwelling. Yet, of what my power
Permits (since thou from Argos draw'st thy birth),
No grace will I omit: for in the tomb
I will place much of ornament, and pour
The dulcet labour of the yellow bee,
From mountain flowers extracted, on thy pyre.
But I will go, and from the temple bring
The letter; yet 'gainst me no hostile thought
Conceive. You, that attend here, guard them well,
But without chains. To one, whom most I love
Of all my friends, to Argos I shall send
Tidings perchance unlook'd for; and this letter,
Declaring those whom he thought dead alive,
Shall bear him an assured and solid joy.

(*She enters the temple.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thee, o'er whose limbs the bloody drops shall soon
Be from the lavers sprinkled, I lament.

ORESTES

This asks no pity, strangers: but farewell.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Thee for thy happy fate we reverence, youth
Who to thy country shall again return.

PYLADES

To friends unwish'd, who leave their friends to die.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

Painful dismission! Which shall I esteem
Most lost, alas, alas! which most undone?
For doubts my wavering judgment yet divide,
If chief for thee my sighs should swell, or thee.

ORESTES

By the gods, Pylades, is thy mind touch'd
In manner like as mine?

PYLADES

I cannot tell;
Nor to thy question have I to reply.

ORESTES

Who is this virgin? With what zeal for Greece
Made she inquiries of us what the toils
At Troy, if yet the Grecians were return'd,
And Calchas, from the flight of birds who form'd
Presages of the future. And she named
Achilles: with what tenderness bewail'd
The unhappy Agamemnon! Of his wife
She ask'd me,—of his children: thence her race
This unknown virgin draws, an Argive; else
Ne'er would she send this letter, nor have wish'd
To know these things, as if she bore a share
(If Argos flourish) in its prosperous state.

PYLADES

Such were my thoughts (but thou hast given them words,
Preventing me) of every circumstance,
Save one: the fate of kings all know, whose state
Holds aught of rank. But pass to other thoughts.

ORESTES

What? Share them; so thou best mayst be inform'd.

PYLADES

That thou shouldst die, and I behold this light,
Were base: with thee I sail'd, with thee to die
Becomes me; else shall I obtain the name
Of a vile coward through the Argive state,
And the deep vales of Phocis. Most will think
(For most think ill) that by betraying thee
I saved myself, home to return alone;
Or haply that I slew thee, and thy death
Contrived, that in the ruin of thy house
Thy empire I might grasp, to me devolved
As wedded to thy sister, now sole heir.
These things I fear, and hold them infamous.
Behooves me then with thee to die, with thee
To bleed a victim, on the pyre with thine
To give my body to the flames; for this
Becomes me as thy friend, who dreads reproach.

ORESTES

Speak more auspicious words: 'tis mine to bear
Ills that are mine; and single when the wo,
I would not bear it double. What thou say'st
Is vile and infamous, would light on me,
Should I cause thee to die, who in my toils
Hast borne a share: to me, who from the gods
Suffer afflictions which I suffer, death
Is not unwelcome: thou art happy, thine
An unpolluted and a prosperous house;
Mine impious and unbless'd: if thou art saved,
And from my sister (whom I gave to thee,
Betroth'd thy bride) art bless'd with sons, my name
May yet remain, nor all my father's house
In total ruin sink. Go then, and live:
Dwell in the mansion of thy ancestors:
And when thou comest to Greece, to Argos famed
For warrior-steeds, by this right hand I charge thee
Raise a sepulchral mound, and on it place
A monument to me; and to my tomb
Her tears, her tresses let my sister give;
And say, that by an Argive woman's hand
I perish'd, to the altar's bloody rites
A hallow'd victim. Never let thy soul
Betray my sister, for thou seest her state,
Of friends how destitute, her father's house
How desolate. Farewell. Of all my friends,
Thee have I found most friendly, from my youth
Train'd up with me, in all my sylvan sports
Thou dear associate, and through many toils
Thou faithful partner of my miseries.
Me Phoebus, though a prophet, hath deceived,
And, meditating guile, hath driven me far
From Greece, of former oracles ashamed;
To him resign'd, obedient to his words,
I slew my mother, and my meed is death.

PYLADES

Yes, I will raise thy tomb: thy sister's bed
I never will betray, unhappy youth,
For I will hold thee dearer when thou art dead,
Than while thou livest; nor hath yet the voice
Of Phoebus quite destroy'd thee, though thou stand

To slaughter nigh; but sometimes mighty woes
Yield mighty changes, so when Fortune wills.

ORESTES

Forbear: the words of Phoebus naught avail me;
For, passing from the shrine, the virgin comes.
(IPHIGENIA *enters from the temple. She is carrying a letter.*)

IPHIGENIA (*to the guards*)

Go you away, and in the shrine prepare
What those, who o'er the rites preside, require.
(*The guards go into the temple.*)
Here, strangers, is the letter folded close:
What I would further, hear. The mind of man
In dangers, and again, from fear relieved,
Of safety when assured, is not the same:
I therefore fear lest he, who should convey
To Argos this epistle, when return'd
Safe to his native country, will neglect
My letter, as a thing of little worth.

ORESTES

What wouldst thou then? What is thy anxious thought?

IPHIGENIA

This: let him give an oath that he will bear
To Argos this epistle to those friends,
To whom it is my ardent wish to send it.

ORESTES

And wilt thou in return give him thy oath?

IPHIGENIA

That I will do, or will not do, say what.

ORESTES

To send him from this barbarous shore alive.

IPHIGENIA

That's just: how should he bear my letter else?

ORESTES

But will the monarch to these things assent?

IPHIGENIA

By me induced. Him I will see embark'd.

ORESTES
Swear then; and thou propose the righteous oath.

IPHIGENIA
This, let him say, he to my friends will give.

PYLADES
Well, to thy friends this letter I will give.

IPHIGENIA
Thee will I send safe through the darkening rocks.

PYLADES
What god dost thou invoke to attest thy oath?

IPHIGENIA
Diana, at whose shrine high charge I hold.

PYLADES
And I heaven's potent king, the awful Jove.

IPHIGENIA
But if thou slight thy oath, and do me wrong?

PYLADES
Never may I return. But if thou fail,
And save me not?

IPHIGENIA
Then never, while I live,
May I revisit my loved Argos more!

PYLADES
One thing, not mention'd, thy attention claims.

IPHIGENIA
If honour owes it, this will touch us both.

PYLADES
Let me in this be pardon'd, if the bark
Be lost, and with it in the surging waves
Thy letter perish, and I naked gain
The shore; no longer binding be the oath.

IPHIGENIA
Know'st thou what I will do? For various ills
Arise to those that plough the dangerous deep.
What in this letter is contain'd, what here

Is written, all I will repeat to thee,
That thou mayst bear my message to my friends.
'Gainst danger thus I guard: if thou preserve
The letter, that though silent will declare
My purport; if it perish in the sea,
Saving thyself, my words too thou wilt save.

PYLADES

Well hast thou said touching the gods and me.
Say then to whom at Argos shall I bear
This letter? What relate as heard from thee?

IPHIGENIA (*reading*)

This message to Orestes, to the son
Of Agamemnon, bear:—She, who was slain
At Aulis, Iphigenia, sends thee this:
She lives, but not to those who then were there.

ORESTES

Where is she? From the dead return'd to life?

IPHIGENIA

She whom thou seest: but interrupt me not.
To Argos, O my brother, ere I die,
Bear me from this barbaric land, and far
Remove me from this altar's bloody rites,
At which to slay the stranger is my charge.—

ORESTES

What shall I say? Where are we, Pylades?

IPHIGENIA

Or on thy house for vengeance will I call,
Orestes. Twice repeated, learn the name.

ORESTES

Ye gods!

IPHIGENIA

In my cause why invoke the gods?

ORESTES

Nothing: proceed: my thoughts were wandering wide:
Strange things of thee unask'd I soon shall learn.

IPHIGENIA

Tell him the goddess saved me, in exchange
A hind presenting, which my father slew
A victim, deeming that he plunged his sword
Deep in my breast: me in this land she placed.
Thou hast my charge: and this my letter speaks.

PYLADES

O, thou hast bound me with an easy oath:
What I have sworn with honest purpose, long
Defer I not, but thus discharge mine oath.
To thee a letter from thy sister, lo,
I bear, Orestes; and I give it thee.
(PYLADES *hands the letter to* ORESTES.)

ORESTES

I do receive it, but forbear to unclose
Its foldings, greater pleasure first to enjoy
Than words can give. My sister, O most dear,
Astonish'd ev'n to disbelief, I throw
Mine arms around thee with a fond embrace,
In transport at the wondrous things I hear.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Stranger, thou dost not well with hands profane
Thus to pollute the priestess of the shrine,
Grasping her garments hallow'd from the touch.

ORESTES

My sister, my dear sister, from one sire,
From Agamemnon sprung, turn not away,
Holding thy brother thus beyond all hope.

IPHIGENIA

My brother! Thou my brother! Wilt thou not
Unsay these words? At Argos far he dwells.

ORESTES

Thy brother, O unhappy! is not there.

IPHIGENIA

Thee did the Spartan Tyndarus bring forth?

ORESTES

And from the son of Pelops' son I sprung.

IPHIGENIA
What say'st thou? Canst thou give me proof of this?

ORESTES
I can: ask something of my father's house.

IPHIGENIA
Nay, it is thine to speak, mine to attend.

ORESTES
First let me mention things which I have heard
Electra speak: to thee is known the strife
Which fierce 'twixt Atreus and Thyestes rose.

IPHIGENIA
Yes, I have heard it; for the golden ram,—

ORESTES
In the rich texture didst thou not inweave it?

IPHIGENIA
O thou most dear! Thou windest near my heart.

ORESTES
And image in the web the averted sun?

IPHIGENIA
In the fine threads that figure did I work.

ORESTES
For Aulis did thy mother bathe thy limbs?

IPHIGENIA
I know it, to unlucky spousals led.

ORESTES
Why to thy mother didst thou send thy locks?

IPHIGENIA
Devoted for my body to the tomb.

ORESTES
What I myself have seen I now as proofs
Will mention. In thy father's house, hung high
Within thy virgin chambers, the old spear
Of Pelops, which he brandish'd when he slew
Oenomaus, and won his beauteous bride,
The virgin Hippodamia, Pisa's boast.

IPHIGENIA

O thou most dear (for thou art he), most dear
Acknowledged, thee, Orestes, do I hold,
From Argos, from thy country distant far?

ORESTES

And hold I thee, my sister, long deem'd dead?
Grief mix'd with joy, and tears, not taught by woe
To rise, stand melting in thy eyes and mine.

IPHIGENIA

Thee yet an infant in thy nurse's arms
I left, a babe I left thee in the house.
Thou art more happy, O my soul, than speech
Knows to express. What shall I say? 'tis all
Surpassing wonder and the power of words.

ORESTES

May we together from this hour be bless'd!

IPHIGENIA

An unexpected pleasure, O my friends,
Have I received; yet fear I from my hands
Lest to the air it fly. O sacred hearths
Raised by the Cyclops! O my country, loved
Mycenae! Now that thou didst give me birth,
I thank thee; now I thank thee, that my youth
Thou trainedst, since my brother thou has train'd,
A beam of light, the glory of his house.

ORESTES

We in our race are happy; but our life,
My sister, by misfortunes is unhappy.

IPHIGENIA

I was, I know, unhappy, when the sword
My father, frantic, pointed at my neck.

ORESTES

Ah me! methinks ev'n now I see thee there.

IPHIGENIA

When to Achilles, brother, not a bride,
I to the sacrifice by guile was led,
And tears and groans the altar compass'd round.

ORESTES

Alas, the lavers there!

IPHIGENIA

I mourn'd the deed
My father dared; unlike a father's love;
Cruel, unlike a father's love, to me.

ORESTES

Ill deeds succeed to ill: if thou hadst slain
Thy brother, by some god impell'd, what griefs
Must have been thine at such a dreadful deed!

IPHIGENIA (*chanting*)

Dreadful, my brother, O how dreadful! scarce
Hast thou escaped a foul, unhallow'd death,
Slain by my hands. But how will these things end?
What Fortune will assist me? What safe means
Shall I devise to send thee from this state,
From slaughter, to thy native land, to Argos,
Ere with thy blood the cruel sword be stain'd?
This to devise, O my unhappy soul!
This to devise is thine. Wilt thou by land,
Thy bark deserted, speed thy flight on foot?
Perils await thee mid these barbarous tribes,
Through pathless wilds; and 'twixt the clashing rocks,
Narrow the passage for the flying bark,
And long. Unhappy, ah, unhappy me!
What god, what mortal, what unlook'd-for chance
Will expedite our dangerous way, and show
Two sprung from Atreus a release from ills?

LEADER

What having seen and heard I shall relate,
Is marvellous, and passes fabling tales.

PYLADES

When after absence long, Orestes, friend
Meets friend, embraces will express their joy.
Behooves us now, bidding farewell to grief,
And heedful to obtain the glorious name
Of safety, from this barbarous land to fly.
The wise, of fortune not regardless, seize
The occasion, and to happiness advance.

ORESTES
Well hast thou said; and Fortune here, I ween,
Will aid us; to the firm and strenuous mind
More potent works the influence divine.

IPHIGENIA
Nothing shall check, nothing restrain my speech:
First will I question thee what fortune waits
Electra: this to know would yield me joy.

ORESTES
With him (*pointing to Pylades*) she dwells, and happy is her life.

IPHIGENIA
Whence then is he? and from what father sprung?

ORESTES
From Phocis: Strophius is his father named.

IPHIGENIA
By Atreus' daughter to my blood allied?

ORESTES
Nearly allied: my only faithful friend.

IPHIGENIA
He was not then, me when my father slew.

ORESTES
Childless was Strophius for some length of time.

IPHIGENIA
O thou, the husband of my sister, hail!

ORESTES
More than relation, my preserver too.

IPHIGENIA
But to thy mother why that dreadful deed?

ORESTES
Of that no more: to avenge my father's death.

IPHIGENIA
But for what cause did she her husband slay?

ORESTES
Of her inquire not: thou wouldst blush to hear.

IPHIGENIA
The eyes of Argos now are raised to thee.

ORESTES
There Menelaus is lord; I, outcast, fly.

IPHIGENIA
Hath he then wrong'd his brother's ruin'd house?

ORESTES
Not so: the Furies fright me from the land.

IPHIGENIA
The madness this, which seized thee on the shore?

ORESTES
I was not first beheld unhappy there.

IPHIGENIA
Stern powers! they haunt thee for thy mother's blood.

ORESTES
And ruthless make me champ the bloody bit.

IPHIGENIA
Why to this region has thou steer'd thy course?

ORESTES
Commanded by Apollo's voice, I come.

IPHIGENIA
With what intent? if that may be disclosed.

ORESTES
I will inform thee, though to length of speech
This leads. When vengeance from my hands o'ertook
My mother's deeds—foul deeds, which let me pass
In silence—by the Furies' fierce assaults
To flight I was impell'd: to Athens then
Apollo sent me, that, my cause there heard,
I might appease the vengeful powers, whose names
May not be utter'd: the tribunal there
Is holy, which for Mars, when stain'd with blood,
Jove in old times establish'd. There arrived,
None willingly received me, by the gods
As one abhorr'd; and they, who felt the touch
Of shame, the hospitable board alone

Yielded; and though one common roof beneath,
Their silence showing they disdain'd to hold
Converse with me, I took from them apart
A lone repast; to each was placed a bowl
Of the same measure; this they filled with wine,
And bathed their spirits in delight. Unmeet
I deem'd it to express offence at those
Who entertain'd me, but in silence grieved,
Showing a cheer as though I mark'd it not,
And sigh'd for that I shed my mother's blood.
A feast, I hear, at Athens is ordain'd
From this my evil plight, ev'n yet observed,
In which the equal-measured bowl then used
Is by that people held in honour high.
But when to the tribunal on the mount
Of Mars I came, one stand I took, and one
The eldest of the Furies opposite:
The cause was heard touching my mother's blood,
And Phoebus saved me by his evidence:
Equal, by Pallas number'd, were the votes,
And I from doom of blood victorious freed.
Such of the Furies as there sat, appeased
By the just sentence, nigh the court resolved
To fix their seat; but others, whom the law
Appeased not, with relentless tortures still
Pursued me, till I reach'd the hallow'd soil
Of Phoebus: stretch'd before his shrine, I swore
Foodless to waste my wretched life away,
Unless the god, by whom I was undone,
Would save me: from the golden tripod burst
The voice divine, and sent me to this shore,
Commanding me to bear the image hence,
Which fell from Jove, and in the Athenian land
To fix it. What the oracular voice assign'd
My safety, do thou aid: if we obtain
The statue of the goddess, I no more
With madness shall be tortured, but this arm
Shall place thee in my bark, which ploughs the waves
With many an oar, and to Mycenae safe
Bear thee again. Show then a sister's love,
O thou most dear; preserve thy father's house,
Preserve me too; for me destruction waits,
And all the race of Pelops, if we bear not
This heaven-descended image from the shrine.

LEADER

The anger of the gods hath raged severe,
And plunged the race of Tantalus in woes.

IPHIGENIA

Ere thy arrival here, a fond desire
To be again at Argos, and to see
Thee, my loved brother, fill'd my soul. Thy wish
Is my warm wish, to free thee from thy toils,
And from its ruins raise my father's house;
Nor harbour I 'gainst him, that slew me, thought
Of harsh resentment: from thy blood my hands
Would I keep pure, thy house I would preserve.
But from the goddess how may this be hid?
The tryant too I fear, when he shall find
The statue on its marble base no more.
What then from death will save me? What excuse
Shall I devise? Yet by one daring deed
Might these things be achieved: couldst thou bear hence
The image, me too in thy gallant bark
Placing secure, how glorious were the attempt!
Me if thou join not with thee, I am lost
Indeed; but thou, with prudent measures form'd,
Return. I fly no danger, not ev'n death,
Be death required, to save thee: no: the man
Dying is mourn'd, as to his house a loss;
But woman's weakness is of light esteem.

ORESTES

I would not be the murderer of my mother,
And of thee too; sufficient is her blood.
No; I will share thy fortune, live with thee,
Or with thee die: to Argos I will lead thee,
If here I perish not; or dying, here
Remain with thee. But what my mind suggests,
Hear: if Diana were averse to this,
How could the voice of Phoebus from his shrine
Declare that to the state of Pallas hence
The statue of the goddess I should bear,
And see thy face? All this, together weigh'd,
Gives hope of fair success, and our return.

IPHIGENIA
But how effect it, that we neither die,
And what we wish achieve? For our return
On this depends: this claims deliberate thought.

ORESTES
Have we not means to work the tyrant's death?

IPHIGENIA
For strangers full of peril were the attempt.

ORESTES
Thee would it save and me, it must be dared.

IPHIGENIA
I could not: yet thy promptness I approve.

ORESTES
What if thou lodge me in the shrine conceal'd?

IPHIGENIA
That in the shades of night we may escape?

ORESTES
Night is a friend to frauds, the light to truth.

IPHIGENIA
Within are sacred guards; we 'scape not them.

ORESTES
Ruin then waits us: how can we be saved?

IPHIGENIA
I think I have some new and safe device.

ORESTES
What is it? Let me know: impart thy thought.

IPHIGENIA
Thy sufferings for my purpose I will use,—

ORESTES
To form devices quick is woman's wit.

IPHIGENIA
And say, thy mother slain, thou fledd'st from Argos.

ORESTES
If to aught good, avail thee of my ills.

IPHIGENIA
Unmeet then at this shrine to offer thee.

ORESTES
What cause alleged? I reach not thine intent.

IPHIGENIA
As now impure: when hallow'd, I will slay thee.

ORESTES
How is the image thus more promptly gain'd?

IPHIGENIA
Thee I will hallow in the ocean waves.

ORESTES
The statue we would gain is in the temple.

IPHIGENIA
That, by thy touch polluted, I would cleanse.

ORESTES
Where? On the watery margin of the main?

IPHIGENIA
Where thy tall bark secured with cables rides.

ORESTES
And who shall bear the image in his hands?

IPHIGENIA
Myself; profaned by any touch but mine.

ORESTES
What of this blood shall on my friend be charged?

IPHIGENIA
His hands, it shall be said, like thine are stain'd.

ORESTES
In secret this, or to the king disclosed?

IPHIGENIA
With his assent; I cannot hide it from him.

ORESTES

My bark with ready oars attends thee near.

IPHIGENIA

That all be well appointed, be thy charge.

ORESTES

One thing alone remains; that these conceal
Our purpose: but address them, teach thy tongue
Persuasive words: a woman hath the power
To melt the heart to pity: thus perchance
All things may to our warmest wish succeed.

IPHIGENIA

Ye train of females, to my soul most dear,
On you mine eyes are turn'd, on you depends
My fate; with prosperous fortune to be bless'd,
Or to be nothing, to my country lost,
Of a dear kinsman and a much-loved brother
Deprived. This plea I first would urge, that we
Are women, and have hearts by nature form'd
To love each other, of our mutual trusts
Most firm preservers. Touching our design,
Be silent, and assist our flight: naught claims
More honour than the faithful tongue. You see
How the same fortune links us three, most dear
Each to the other, to revisit safe
Our country, or to die. If I am saved,
That thou mayst share my fortune, I to Greece
Will bring thee safe: but thee by this right hand,
Thee I conjure, and thee; by this loved cheek
Thee, by thy knees, by all that in your house
Is dearest to you, father, mother, child,
If you have children. What do you reply?
Which of you speaks assent? Or which dissents?
But be you all assenting: for my plea
If you approve not, ruin falls on me,
And my unhappy brother too must die.

LEADER

Be confident, loved lady and consult
Only thy safety: all thou givest in charge,
Be witness, mighty Jove, I will conceal.

IPHIGENIA

O, for this generous promise be you bless'd.
(*To* ORESTES *and* PYLADES)
To enter now the temple be thy part,
And thine: for soon the monarch of the land
Will come, inquiring if the strangers yet
Have bow'd their necks as victims at the shrine.
Goddess revered, who in the dreadful bay
Of Aulis from my father's slaughtering hand
Didst save me; save me now, and these: through thee,
Else will the voice of Phoebus be no more
Held true by mortals. From this barbarous land
To Athens go propitious: here to dwell
Beseems thee not; thine be a polish'd state!
(ORESTES, PYLADES, *and* IPHIGENIA *enter the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

O bird, that round each craggy height
Projecting o'er the sea below,
Wheelest thy melancholy flight,
Thy song attuned to notes of woe;
The wise thy tender sorrows own,
Which thy lost lord unceasing moan;
Like thine, sad halcyon, be my strain,
A bird, that have no wings to fly:
With fond desire for Greece I sigh,
And for my much-loved social train;
Sigh for Diana, pitying maid,
Who joys to rove o'er Cynthus' heights,
Or in the branching laurel's shade,
Or in the soft-hair'd palm delights,
Or the hoar olive's sacred boughs,
Lenient of sad Latona's woes;
Or in the lake, that rolls its wave
Where swans their plumage love to lave;
Then, to the Muses soaring high,
The homage pay of melody.

antistrophe 1

Ye tears, what frequent-falling showers
Roll'd down these cheeks in streams of woe,
When in the dust my country's towers
Lay levell'd by the conquering foe;

And, to their spears a prey, their oars
Brought me to these barbaric shores!
For gold exchanged, a traffic base,
No vulgar slave, the task is mine,
Here at Diana's awful shrine,
Who loves the woodland hind to chase,
The virgin priestess to attend,
Daughter of rich Mycenae's lord;
At other shrines her wish to bend,
Where bleeds the victim less abhorr'd:
No respite to her griefs she knows;
Not so the heart inured to woes,
As train'd to sorrow's rigid lore:
Now comes a change; it mourns no more:
But to long bliss when ill succeeds,
The anguish'd heart for ever bleeds.

strophe 2

Thee, loved virgin, freed from fear
Home the Argive bark shall bear:
Mountain Pan, with thrilling strain,
To the oars that dash the main
In just cadence well agreed,
Shall accord his wax-join'd reed:
Phoebus, with a prophet's fire
Sweeping o'er his seven-string'd lyre,
And his voice attuning high
To the swelling harmony,
Thee shall guide the wild waves o'er
To the soft Athenian shore.
Leaving me, thy oars shall sweep
Eager o'er the foaming deep:
Thou shalt catch the rising gales
Swelling in thy firm-bound sails;
And thy bark in gallant pride
Light shall o'er the billows glide.

antistrophe 2

Might I through the lucid air
Fly where rolls yon flaming car,
O'er those loved and modest bowers,
Where I pass'd my youthful hours,
I would stay my weary flight,
Wave no more my pennons light,

But, amid the virgin band,
Once my loved companions, stand:
Once mid them my charms could move,
Blooming then, the flames of love;
When the mazy dance I trod,
While with joy my mother glow'd;
When to vie in grace was mine,
And in splendid robes to shine;
For, with radiant tints impress'd,
Glow'd for me the gorgeous vest;
And these tresses gave new grace,
As their ringlets shade my face.

(THOAS *and his retinue enter.*)

THOAS

Where is the Grecian lady, to whose charge
This temple is committed? Have her rites
Hallow'd the strangers? Do their bodies burn
In the recesses of the sacred shrine?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

She comes, and will inform thee, king, of all.
(IPHIGENIA *comes out of the temple. She is carrying the sacred statue of Diana.*)

THOAS

Daughter of Agamemnon, what means this?
The statue of the goddess in thine arms
Why dost thou bear, from its firm base removed?

IPHIGENIA

There in the portal, monarch, stay thy step.

THOAS

What of strange import in the shrine hath chanced?

IPHIGENIA

Things ominous: that word I, holy, speak.

THOAS

To what is tuned thy proem? Plainly speak.

IPHIGENIA

Not pure the victims, king, you lately seized.

THOAS
What show'd thee this? Or speak'st thou but thy thought?

IPHIGENIA
Back turn'd the sacred image on its base.

THOAS
Spontaneous turn'd, or by an earthquake moved?

IPHIGENIA
Spontaneous, and, averted, closed its eyes.

THOAS
What was the cause? The blood-stain'd stranger's guilt?

IPHIGENIA
That, and naught else; for horrible their deeds.

THOAS
What, have they slain some Scythian on the shore?

IPHIGENIA
They came polluted with domestic blood.

THOAS
What blood? I have a strong desire to know.

IPHIGENIA
They slew their mother with confederate swords.

THOAS
O Phoebus! This hath no barbarian dared.

IPHIGENIA
All Greece indignant chased them from her realms.

THOAS
Bear'st thou for this the image from the shrine?

IPHIGENIA
To the pure air, from stain of blood removed.

THOAS
By what means didst thou know the stranger's guilt?

IPHIGENIA
I learn'd it as the statue started back.

THOAS
Greece train'd thee wise: this well hast thou discern'd.

IPHIGENIA
Now with sweet blandishments they soothe my soul.

THOAS
Some glozing tale from Argos telling thee?

IPHIGENIA
I have one brother: he, they say, lives happy,—

THOAS
That thou mayst save them for their pleasing news?

IPHIGENIA
And that my father lives, by fortune bless'd.

THOAS
But on the goddess well thy thoughts are turn'd.

IPHIGENIA
I hate all Greece; for it hath ruin'd me.

THOAS
What with the strangers, say then, should be done?

IPHIGENIA
The law ordain'd in reverence we must hold.

THOAS
Are then thy lavers ready, and the sword?

IPHIGENIA
First I would cleanse them with ablutions pure.

THOAS
In fountain waters, or the ocean wave?

IPHIGENIA
All man's pollutions doth the salt sea cleanse.

THOAS
More holy to the goddess will they bleed.

IPHIGENIA
And better what I have in charge advance.

THOAS
Doth not the wave ev'n 'gainst the temple beat?

IPHIGENIA
This requires solitude: more must I do.

THOAS
Lead where thou wilt: on secret rite I pry not.

IPHIGENIA
The image of the goddess I must cleanse.

THOAS
If it be stain'd with touch of mother's blood.

IPHIGENIA
I could not else have borne it from its base.

THOAS
Just is thy provident and pious thought;
For this by all the state thou art revered.

IPHIGENIA
Know'st thou what next I would?

THOAS
'Tis thine thy will
To signify.

IPHIGENIA
Give for these strangers chains.

THOAS
To what place can they fly?

IPHIGENIA
A Grecian knows
Naught faithful.

THOAS
Of my train go some for chains.
(*Some attendants go out.*)

IPHIGENIA
Let them lead forth the strangers.

THOAS
Be it so.

IPHIGENIA

And veil their faces.

THOAS

From the sun's bright beams?

IPHIGENIA

Some of thy train send with me.

THOAS

These shall go,

Attending thee.

IPHIGENIA

One to the city send.

THOAS

With what instructions charged?

IPHIGENIA

That all remain

Within their houses.

THOAS

That the stain of blood

They meet not?

IPHIGENIA

These things have pollution in them.

THOAS

Go thou, and bear the instructions.
(*An attendant departs.*)

IPHIGENIA

That none come

In sight.

THOAS

How wisely careful for the city!

IPHIGENIA

Warn our friends most.

THOAS

This speaks thy care for me.

IPHIGENIA
Stay thou before the shrine.

THOAS
To what intent?

IPHIGENIA
Cleanse it with lustral fires.

THOAS
That thy return

May find it pure?

IPHIGENIA
But when the strangers come
Forth from the temple,—

THOAS
What must I then do?

IPHIGENIA
Spread o'er thine eyes a veil.

THOAS
That I receive not

Pollution?

IPHIGENIA
Tedious if my stay appear,—

THOAS
What bounds may be assign'd?

IPHIGENIA
Deem it not strange.

THOAS
At leisure what the rites require perform.

IPHIGENIA
May this lustration as I wish succeed!

THOAS
Thy wish is mine.

(ORESTES *and* PYLADES, *bound, are led from the temple in a solemn procession by the guards.* THOAS *and his retinue veil their heads as it slowly moves past.*)

IPHIGENIA (*chanting*)

But from the temple, see,
The strangers come, the sacred ornaments,
The hallow'd lambs—for I with blood must wash
This execrable blood away,—the light
Of torches, and what else my rites require
To purify these strangers to the goddess.
But to the natives of this land my voice
Proclaims, from this pollution far remove,
Art thou attendant at the shrine, who liftest
Pure to the gods thy hands, or nuptial rites
Dost thou prepare, or pregnant matron; hence,
Begone, that this defilement none may touch.
Thou, daughter of Latona and high Jove,
O royal virgin, if I cleanse the stain
Of these, and where I ought with holy rites
Address thee, thou shalt hold thy residence
In a pure mansion; we too shall be bless'd.
More though I speak not, goddess, unexpress'd,
All things to thee and to the gods are known.
(IPHIGENIA, *carrying the statue, joins the procession as it goes out.* THOAS *and his retinue enter the temple.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Latona's glorious offspring claims the song,
Born the hallow'd shades among,
Where fruitful Delos winds her valleys low;
Bright-hair'd Phoebus, skill'd to inspire
Raptures, as he sweeps the lyre,
And she that glories in the unerring bow.
From the rocky ridges steep,
At whose feet the hush'd waves sleep,
Left their far-famed native shore,
Them the exulting mother bore
To Parnassus, on whose heights
Bacchus shouting holds his rites;
Glittering in the burnish'd shade,
By the laurel's branches made,
Where the enormous dragon lies,
Brass his scales, and flame his eyes,
Earth-born monster, that around
Rolling guards the oracular ground;

Him, while yet a sportive child,
In his mother's arms that smiled,
Phoebus slew, and seized the shrine
Whence proceeds the voice divine:
On the golden tripod placed,
Throne by falsehood ne'er disgraced,
Where Castalia's pure stream flows,
He the fates to mortal shows.

antistrophe

But when Themis, whom of yore
Earth, her fruitful mother, bore,
From her hallow'd seat he drove,
Earth to avenge her daughter strove,
Forming visions of the night,
Which, in rapt dreams hovering light,
All that Time's dark volumes hold
Might to mortal sense unfold,
When in midnight's sable shades
Sleep the silent couch invades:
Thus did Earth her vengeance boast.
His prophetic honours lost,
Royal Phoebus speeds his flight
To Olympus, on whose height
At the throne of Jove he stands,
Stretching forth his little hands,
Suppliant that the Pythian shrine
Feel no more the wrath divine;
That the goddess he appease;
That her nightly visions cease.
Jove with smiles beheld his son
Early thus address his throne,
Suing with ambitious pride
O'er the rich shrine to preside;
He, assenting, bow'd his head.
Straight the nightly visions fled;
And prophetic dreams no more
Hover'd slumbering mortals o'er:
Now to Phoebus given again,
All his honours pure remain;
Votaries distant regions send
His frequented throne to attend:
And the firm decrees of fate

On his faithful voice await.

(*A* MESSENGER *enters.*)

MESSENGER

Say you, that keep the temple, and attend
The altar, where is Thoas, Scythia's king?
Open these strong-compacted gates, and call
Forth from the shrine the monarch of the land.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Wherefore? at thy command if I must speak.

MESSENGER

The two young men are gone, through the device
Of Agamemnon's daughter: from this land
They fly; and, in their Grecian galley placed,
The sacred image of the goddess bear.

LEADER

Incredible thy tale: but whom thou seek'st,
The monarch, from the temple went in haste.

MESSENGER

Whither? for what is doing he should know.

LEADER

We know not: but go thou, and seek for him:
Where'er thou find him, thou wilt tell him this.

MESSENGER

See, what a faithless race you women are!
In all that hath been done you have a part.

LEADER

Sure thou art mad! what with the strangers' flight
Have we to do? But wilt thou not, with all
The speed thou mayst, go to the monarch's house?

MESSENGER

Not till I first am well inform'd, if here
Within the temple be the king, or not.

(*Shouting*)

Unbar the gates (to you within I speak);
And tell your lord that at the portal here
I stand, and bring him tidings of fresh ills.
(THOAS *and his attendants enter from the temple.*)

THOAS

Who at the temple of the goddess dares
This clamour raise, and, thundering at the gates,
Strikes terror through the ample space within?

MESSENGER

With falsehoods would these women drive me hence,
Without to seek thee: thou wast in the shrine.

THOAS

With what intent? or what advantage sought?

MESSENGER

Of these hereafter; what more urgent now
Imports thee, hear: the virgin, in this place
Presiding at the altars, from this land
Is with the strangers fled, and bears with her
The sacred image of the goddess; all
Of her ablutions but a false pretence.

THOAS

How say'st thou? What is her accursed design?

MESSENGER

To save Orestes: this too will amaze thee.

THOAS

Whom? What Orestes? Clytemnestra's son?

MESSENGER

Him at the altar hallow'd now to bleed.

THOAS

Portentous! for what less can it be call'd?

MESSENGER

Think not on that, but hear me; with deep thought
Reflect: weigh well what thou shalt hear; devise
By what pursuit to reach and seize the strangers.

THOAS

Speak: thou advisest well: the sea though nigh,
They fly not so as to escape my spear.

MESSENGER

When to the shore we came, where station'd rode
The galley of Orestes, by the rocks

Their arms fierce darting, till our batter'd limbs
Were all disabled: now with dreadful marks
Disfigured, up the precipice we fly,
Some bearing on their heads, some in their eyes
The bloody bruises: standing on the heights,
Our fight was safer, and we hurl'd at them
Fragments of rocks; but, standing on the stern,
The archers with their arrows drove us thence;
And now a swelling wave roll'd in, which drove
The galley towards the land. The sailors fear'd
The sudden swell: on his left arm sustain'd,
Orestes bore his sister through the tide,
Mounted the bark's tall side, and on the deck
Safe placed her, and Diana's holy image,
Which fell from heaven; from the midship his voice
He sent aloud:—"Ye youths, that in this bark
From Argos plough'd the deep, now ply your oars,
And dash the billows till they foam: those things
Are ours, for which we swept the Euxine sea.
And steer'd our course within its clashing rocks."
They gave a cheerful shout, and with their oars
Dash'd the salt wave. The galley, while it rode
Within the harbour, work'd its easy way;
But having pass'd its mouth, the swelling flood
Roll'd on it, and with sudden force the wind
Impetuous rising drove it back: their oars
They slack'd not, stoutly struggling 'gainst the wave;
But towards the land the refluent flood impell'd
The galley: then the royal virgin stood,
And pray'd:—"O daughter of Latona, save me,
Thy priestess save; from this barbaric land
To Greece restore me, and forgive my thefts:
For thou, O goddess, dost thy brother love,
Deem then that I love those allied to me."
The mariners responsive to her prayer
Shouted loud paeans, and their naked arms,
Each cheering each, to their stout oars apply.
But nearer and yet nearer to the rock
The galley drove: some rush'd into the sea,
Some strain'd the ropes that bind the loosen'd sails.
Straight was I hither sent to thee, O king,
To inform thee of these accidents. But haste,
Take chains and gyves with thee; for if the flood

Subside not to a calm, there is no hope
Of safety to the strangers. Be assured,
That Neptune, awful monarch of the main,
Remembers Troy; and, hostile to the race
Of Pelops, will deliver to thy hands,
And to thy people, as is meet, the son
Of Agamemnon; and bring back to thee
His sister, who the goddess hath betray'd,
Unmindful of the blood at Aulis shed.

LEADER

Unhappy Iphigenia, thou must die,
Thy brother too must die, if thou again,
Seized in thy flight, to thy lord's hands shalt come.

THOAS

Inhabitants of this barbaric land,
Will you not rein your steeds, will you not fly
Along the shore, to seize whate'er this skiff
Of Greece casts forth; and, for your goddess roused,
Hunt down these impious men? Will you not launch
Instant your swift-oar'd barks, by sea, by land
To catch them, from the rugged rock to hurl
Their bodies, or impale them on the stake?
But for you, women, in these dark designs
Accomplices, hereafter, as I find
Convenient leisure, I will punish you.
The occasion urges now, and gives no pause.

(MINERVA *appears above.*)

MINERVA

Whither, O royal Thoas, dost thou lead
This vengeful chase? Attend: Minerva speaks.
Cease thy pursuit, and stop this rushing flood
Of arms; for hither, by the fateful voice
Of Phoebus, came Orestes, warn'd to fly
The anger of the Furies, to convey
His sister to her native Argos back,
And to my land the sacred image bear.
Thoas, I speak to thee: him, whom thy rage
Would kill, Orestes, on the wild waves seized,
Neptune, to do me grace, already wafts
On the smooth sea, the swelling surges calm'd.

And thou, Orestes (for my voice thou hear'st,
Though distant far), to my commands attend:
Go, with the sacred image, which thou bear'st,
And with thy sister: but when thou shalt come
To Athens built by gods, there is a place
On the extreme borders of the Attic land,
Close neighbouring to Carystia's craggy height,
Sacred; my people call it Alae: there
A temple raise, and fix the statue there,
Which from the Tauric goddess shall receive
Its name, and from thy toils, which thou, through Greece
Driven by the Furies' maddening stings, hast borne;
And mortals shall in future times with hymns
The Tauric goddess there, Diana, hail.
And be this law establish'd; when the feast
For thy deliverance from this shrine is held,
To a man's throat that they apply the sword,
And draw the blood, in memory of these rites,
That of her honours naught the goddess lose.
Thou, Iphigenia, on the hallow'd heights
Of Brauron on this goddess shalt attend
Her priestess, dying shalt be there interr'd,
Graced with the honours of the gorgeous vests
Of finest texture, in their houses left
By matrons who in childbed pangs expired.
These Grecian dames back to their country lead,
I charge thee; justice this return demands,
For I saved thee, when on the mount of Mars
The votes were equal; and from that decree
The shells in number equal still absolve.
But, son of Agamemnon, from this land
Thy sister bear; nor, Thoas, be thou angry.

THOAS

Royal Minerva, he that hears the gods
Commanding, and obeys not, is unwise.
My anger 'gainst Orestes flames no more,
Gone though he be, and bears with him away
The statue of the goddess, and his sister.
Have mortals glory 'gainst the powerful gods
Contending? Let them go, and to thy land
The sacred image bear, and fix it there;
Good fortune go with them. To favour Greece,

These dames, at thy high bidding, I will send.
My arms will I restrain, which I had raised
Against the strangers, and my swift-oar'd barks,
Since, potent goddess, this is pleasing to thee.

MINERVA

I praise thy resolution; for the power
Of Fate o'er thee and o'er the gods prevails.
Breathe soft, ye favouring gales, to Athens bear
These sprung from Agamemnon; on their course
Attending, I will go, and heedful save
My sister's sacred image. You too go (*to the* CHORUS)
Prosperous, and in the fate that guards you bless'd.
(MINERVA *vanishes.*)

CHORUS (*chanting*)

O thou, among the immortal gods revered
And mortal men, Minerva, we will do
As thou commandest; for with transport high,
Exceeding hope, our ears receive thy words.

O Victory, I revere thy awful power: [3]
Guard thou my life, nor ever cease to crown me!

R. POTTER, whose translation of Aeschylus appeared in 1777, did a complete version of Euripides, which was published in 1781 and 1782. In the present rendering, Potter has followed the eighteenth century convention of using the Roman or Latin forms for various proper names. Hence Artemis and Athena appear as Diana and Minerva.

1. Modern editors do not assign the parts of this choral passage as they are found here.

2. The following lines seem to reflect Euripides' violent reaction against the taints of anthropomorphism in the orthodox theology. Cf. Plato's consistently held position that a god by his very nature must be good.

3. These closing lines, found also at the end of *The Phoenissae* and the *Orestes*, have nothing to do with the play, but are really a prayer for victory in the dramatic contest.

XI
ION

Characters in the Play

Mercury
Ion
Creusa, *daughter of Erechtheus*
Xuthus, *husband of* Creusa
Tutor
Attendant
Priestess of Apollo
Minerva
Chorus of Handmaidens of Creusa
Attendants of the Temple of Apollo

INTRODUCTION

THE *Ion*, though it cannot be accurately dated, in all probability falls among the later works of Euripides. The play deals with material not handled elsewhere in the extant Greek drama, and seems to depart somewhat from the norm of Greek tragic composition, even beyond the broader limits marked out for it by Euripides. The play opens with an unusually long prologue, spoken by the god Mercury, who incidentally does not figure at all in the subsequent action. We are told that Creusa, daughter of the legendary king of Athens, Erechtheus, had secretly borne a son to the god Apollo. This happened many years prior to the opening of the play. Creusa, in her shame, had exposed her new-born infant, and now supposes him dead, but Apollo with the help of Mercury had caused the child to be transported to Delphi, where he was reared by the Pythian priestess and has now reached young manhood. He does not know his parentage, but has devoted his life to the service of the oracular god and his temple. In the meantime, Creusa has married a certain Xuthus, but their union has been unblessed by offspring. As the play opens, it emerges that the unhappy couple have come to ask the assistance of Apollo to cure their childlessness.

Out of this dramatic situation the action of the *Ion* develops. In many ways the resultant piece seems to resemble more closely a Greek New Comedy than it does the normal tragedy. The ending of the play is happy: Ion is discovered to be Creusa's long-lost son, when, in a manner characteristic of the technique conventional in New Comedy, she recognizes the paraphernalia in which the child was exposed and which have been carefully preserved through the years by the Pythian priestess. In this respect the *Ion* constitutes evidence for the widely held critical thesis that the poets of the New Comedy were more influenced by and were more indebted to Euripides than to the writers of Old Comedy.

Attractive as the theory may be that the *Ion* is merely a Euripidean prototype of the New Comedy, there are in fact several elements in the play which are not easy to interpret on this hypothesis. One such element is the fact that there is present in certain passages an intense melodramatic tone which would not be found in the later comic poets. To illus-

trate, when the oracle deceitfully causes Xuthus to think that Ion is his son, born of a youthful escapade, his desire for parenthood is satisfied, but Creusa is insanely jealous. She plans to kill Ion, but the attempt at murder proves abortive, and she herself in a tense scene is on the point of being slain when the timely discovery that they are mother and son supervenes.

Likewise uncharacteristic of the New Comedy is the extent to which the gods and religion seem to be emphasized in the *Ion*. The interpretation of this aspect of the play has proved most difficult. Apollo appears in some ways as nothing but a seducer who tries desperately to save his face and the reputation of his oracle by using deception. In fact, even in the dénouement it becomes evident that Xuthus is never to be informed of the true parentage of Ion. Hence critics have been led to suppose that the play is one of Euripides' most telling indictments levelled against the orthodox anthropomorphic religion, which believes in such travesties of deity, and respects the lying and corrupt oracles of Delphi which do nothing except make for the perversion of true religion. Such an interpretation might be invalidated by urging that the gods and the divine elements in the play are merely technical instruments in the hands of the dramatist wherewith he is better able to develop and resolve his plot. Corollary to this theory would be the contention that Euripides is primarily interested in his dramatic situation, secondarily interested in portraying the characters of Ion, Creusa, and Xuthus when they are involved in this situation, and finally that the religious meaning is farthest from his thought and only apparently significant in the play because through the exigencies of his plot he has been forced to use gods as characters. Perhaps no final answer can be given to this problem of interpretation, but in any event, the play itself has enough intrinsic power to warrant placing it among the more interesting of Euripides' dramatic compositions.

ION

(SCENE:—*Before the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. The sun is about to rise.* MERCURY *enters.*)

MERCURY

Atlas, that on his brazen shoulders rolls
Yon heaven, the ancient mansion of the gods,
Was by a goddess sire to Maia; she
To supreme Jove bore me, and call'd me Hermes;
Attendant on the king, his high behests
I execute. To Delphi am I come,
This land where Phoebus from his central throne
Utters to mortals his high strain, declaring
The present and the future; this is the cause;
Greece hath a city of distinguish'd glory,
Which from the goddess of the golden lance
Received its name; Erechtheus was its king;
His daughter, call'd Creusa, to the embrace
Of nuptial love Apollo strain'd perforce,
Where northward points the rock beneath the heights
Crown'd with the Athenian citadel of Pallas,
Call'd Macrai by the lords of Attica.
Her growing burden, to her sire unknown
(Such was the pleasure of the god), she bore,
Till in her secret chamber to a son
The rolling months gave birth: to the same cave,
Where by the enamour'd god she was compress'd,
Creusa bore the infant: there for death
Exposed him in a well-compacted ark
Of circular form, observant of the customs
Drawn from her great progenitors, and chief
From Erichthonius, who from the Attic earth
Deriv'd his origin: to him as guards
Minerva gave two dragons, and in charge

Consign'd him to the daughters of Aglauros:
This rite to the Erechthidae hence remains,
Mid serpents wreathed in ductile gold to nurse
Their children. What of ornament she had
She hung around her son, and left him thus
To perish. But to me his earnest prayer
Phoebus applied, "To the high-lineaged sons
Of glorious Athens go, my brother; well
Thou know'st the city of Pallas; from the cave
Deep in the hollow rock a new-born babe,
Laid as he is, and all his vestments with him,
Bring to thy brother to my shrine, and place
At the entrance of my temple; of the rest
(For, know, the child is mine) I will take care."
To gratify my brother thence I bore
The osier-woven ark, and placed the boy
Here at the temple's base, the wreathed lid
Uncovering, that the infant might be seen.
It chanced, as the orient sun the steep of heav'n
Ascended, to the god's oracular seat
The priestess entering, on the infant cast
Her eye, and marvelled, deeming that some nymph
Of Delphi at the fane had dared to lay
The secret burden of her womb: this thought
Prompts her to move it from the shrine: but soon
To pity she resign'd the harsh intent;
The impulse of the god secretly acting
In favour of the child, that in his temple
It might abide; her gentle hand then took it,
And gave it nurture; yet conceived she not
That Phoebus was the sire, nor who the mother
Knew aught, nor of his parents could the child
Give information. All his youthful years
Sportive he wandered round the shrine, and there
Was fed: but when his firmer age advanced
To manhood, o'er the treasures of the god
The Delphians placed him, to his faithful care
Consigning all; and in this royal dome
His hallow'd life he to this hour hath pass'd.
Meantime Creusa, mother of the child,
To Xuthus was espoused, the occasion this:—
On Athens from Euboean Chalcis roll'd
The waves of war; he join'd their martial toil,

And with his spear repell'd the foe; for this
To the proud honour of Creusa's bed
Advanc'd; no native, in Achaea sprung
From Aeolus, the son of Jove. Long time
Unbless'd with children, to the oracular shrine
Of Phoebus are they come, through fond desire
Of progeny: to this the god hath brought
The fortune of his son, nor, as was deem'd,
Forgets him; but to Xuthus, when he stands
This sacred seat consulting, will he give
That son, declared his offspring; that the child,
When to Creusa's house brought back, by her
May be agnized; the bridal rites of Phoebus
Kept secret, that the youth may claim the state
Due to his birth, through all the states of Greece
Named Ion, founder of the colonies
On the Asiatic coast. The laurell'd cave
Now will I visit, there to learn what fortune
Is to the boy appointed, for I see
This son of Phoebus issuing forth to adorn
The gates before the shrine with laurel boughs.
First of the gods I hail him by the name
Of Ion, which his fortune soon will give him.
(MERCURY *vanishes.* ION *and the attendants of the temple enter.*)

ION (*chanting*)

Now flames this radiant chariot of the sun
High o'er the earth, at whose ethereal fire
The stars into the sacred night retreat:
O'er the Parnassian cliffs the ascending wheels
To mortals roll the beams of day; the wreaths
Of incense-breathing myrrh mount to the roof
Of Phœbus' fane; the Delphic priestess now
Assumes her seat, and from the hallow'd tripod
Pronounces to the Greeks the oracular strains
Which the god dictates. Haste, ye Delphic train,
Haste to Castalia's silver-streaming fount;
Bathed in its chaste dews to the temple go;
There from your guarded mouths no sound be heard
But of good omen, that to those who crave
Admission to the oracle, your voice
May with auspicious words expound the answers.

My task, which from my early infancy
Hath been my charge, shall be with laurel boughs
And sacred wreaths to cleanse the vestibule
Of Phoebus, on the pavement moistening dews
To rain, and with my bow to chase the birds
Which would defile the hallow'd ornaments.
A mother's fondness, and a father's care
I never knew: the temple of the god
Claims then my service, for it nurtured me.

(*The attendants leave.* Ion *busies himself before the temple as he continues to sing.*)

strophe

Haste, thou verdant new-sprung bough,
Haste, thy early office know;
Branch of beauteous laurel come,
Sweep Apollo's sacred dome,
Cropp'd this temple's base beneath,
Where the immortal gardens breathe,
And eternal dews that round
Water the delicious ground,
Bathe the myrtle's tresses fair.
Lightly thus, with constant care,
The pavement of the god I sweep,
When over the Parnassian steep
Flames the bright sun's mounting ray;
This my task each rising day.
Son of Latona, Paean, Paean, hail!
Never, O never may thy honours fail!

antistrophe

Grateful is my task, who wait
Serving, Phoebus, at thy gate;
Honouring thus thy hallow'd shrine,
Honour for the task is mine.
Labouring with unwilling hands,
Me no mortal man commands:
But, immortal gods, to you
All my pleasing toil is due.
Phoebus is to me a sire;
Grateful thoughts my soul inspire;
Nurtured by thy bounty here,
Thee, Apollo, I revere;

And thy name in this rich seat
As a father's I repeat.
Son of Latona, Paean, Paean, hail!
Never, O never may thy honours fail!

Now from this labour with the laurel bough
I cease; and sprinkling from the golden vase
The chaste drops which Castalia's fountain rolls,
Bedew the pavement. Never may I quit
This office to the god; or, if I quit it,
Be it, good Fortune, at thy favouring call!
But see, the early birds have left their nests,
And this way from Parnassus wing their flight.
Come not, I charge you, near the battlements,
Nor near the golden dome. Herald of Jove,
Strong though thy beak beyond the feather'd kind,
My bow shall reach thee. Towards the altar, see,
A swan comes sailing: elsewhere wilt thou move
Thy scarlet-tinctured foot? or from my bow
The lyre of Phoebus to thy notes attuned
Will not protect thee; farther stretch thy wings;
Go, wanton, skim along the Delian lake,
Or wilt thou steep thy melody in blood.
Look, what strange bird comes onwards; wouldst thou fix
Beneath the battlements thy straw-built nest?
My singing bow shall drive thee hence; begone,
Or to the banks of Alpheus, gulfy stream,
Or to the Isthmian grove; there hatch thy young;
Mar not these pendent ornaments, nor soil
The temple of the god: I would not kill you:
'Twere pity, for to mortal man you bear
The message of the gods; yet my due task
Must be perform'd, and never will I cease
My service to the god who nurtured me.

(*The* CHORUS *enters. The following lines between* ION *and the* CHORUS *are chanted responsively as they gaze admiringly at the decorations on the temple.*)

CHORUS [1]

The stately column, and the gorgeous dome
Raised to the gods, are not the boast alone
Of our magnificent Athens; nor the statues
That grace her streets; this temple of the god,

Son of Latona, beauteous to behold,
Beams the resplendent light of both her children.

ION

Turn thine eyes this way; look, the son of Jove
Lops with his golden scimitar the heads
Of the Lernean Hydra: view it well.

CHORUS

I see him.

ION

And this other standing nigh,
Who snatches from the fire the blazing brand.

CHORUS

What is his name? the subject, on the web
Design'd, these hands have wrought in ductile gold.

ION

The shield-supporting Iolaus, who bears
The toils in common with the son of Jove.
View now this hero; on his winged steed
The triple-bodied monster's dreadful force
He conquers through the flames his jaws emit.

CHORUS

I view it all attentively.

ION

Observe
The battle of the giants, on the walls
Sculptured in stone.

CHORUS

Let us note this, my friends.

ION

See where against Enceladus she shakes
Her gorgon shield.

CHORUS

I see my goddess, Pallas.

ION

Mark the tempestuous thunder's flaming bolt
Launch'd by the hand of Jove.

CHORUS

The furious Mimas
Here blazes in the volley'd fires: and there
Another earth-born monster falls beneath
The wand of Bacchus wreathed with ivy round,
No martial spear. But, as 'tis thine to tend
This temple, let me ask thee, is it lawful,
Leaving our sandals, its interior parts
To visit?

ION

Strangers, this is not permitted.

CHORUS

Yet may we make inquiries of thee?

ION

Speak;
What wouldst thou know?

CHORUS

Whether this temple's site
Be the earth's centre?

ION

Ay, with garlands hung,
And gorgons all around.

CHORUS

So fame reports.

ION

If at the gate the honey'd cake be offer'd,
Would you consult the oracle, advance
To the altar: till the hallow'd lamb has bled
In sacrifice, approach not the recess.

CHORUS

I am instructed: what the god appoints
As laws, we wish not to transgress: without
Enough of ornament delights our eyes.

ION

Take a full view of all; that is allow'd.

CHORUS

To view the inmost shrine was our lord's order.

ION

Who are you call'd? Attendants on what house?

CHORUS

Our lords inhabit the magnific domes
Of Pallas.—But she comes, of whom thou askest.
(CREUSA *and attendants enter.*)

ION

Lady, whoe'er thou art, that liberal air
Speaks an exalted mind: there is a grace,
A dignity in those of noble birth,
That marks their high rank. Yet I marvel much
That from thy closed lids the trickling tear
Water'd thy beauteous cheeks, soon as thine eye
Beheld this chaste oracular seat of Phoebus.
What brings this sorrow, lady? All besides,
Viewing the temple of the god, are struck
With joy; thy melting eye o'erflows with tears.

CREUSA

Not without reason, stranger, art thou seized
With wonder at my tears: this sacred dome
Awakes the sad remembrance of things past.
I had my mind at home, though present here.
How wretched is our sex! And, O ye gods,
What deeds are yours! Where may we hope for right,
If by the injustice of your power undone?

ION

Why, lady, this inexplicable grief?

CREUSA

It matters not; my mind resumes its firmness:
I say no more; cease thy concern for me.

ION

But say, who art thou? whence? what country boasts
Thy birth? and by what name may we address thee?

CREUSA

Creusa is my name, drawn from Erechtheus
My high-born lineage; Athens gave me birth.

ION

Illustrious is thy state; thy ancestry
So noble, that I look with reverence on thee.

CREUSA

Happy indeed is this, in nothing farther.

ION

But tell me, is it true what fame has blazon'd?

CREUSA

What wouldst thou ask? Stranger, I wish to know.

ION

Sprung the first author of thy line from the earth?

CREUSA

Ay, Erichthonius; but my race avails not.

ION

And did Minerva raise him from the earth?

CREUSA

Held in her virgin hands: she bore him not.

ION

And gave him as the picture represents?

CREUSA

Daughters of Cecrops these, charged not to see him.

ION

The virgins ope'd the interdicted chest?

CREUSA

And died, distaining with their blood the rock.

ION

But tell me, is this truth, or a vain rumour?

CREUSA

What wouldst thou ask? I am not scant of time.

ION

Thy sisters did Erechtheus sacrifice?

CREUSA

He slew the virgins, victims for their country.

ION
And thou of all thy sisters saved alone?

CREUSA
I was an infant in my mother's arms.

ION
And did the yawning earth swallow thy father?

CREUSA
By Neptune's trident smote; and so he perish'd.

ION
And Macrai call you not the fatal place?

CREUSA
Why dost thou ask? What thoughts hast thou recall'd?

ION
Does Phoebus, do his lightnings honour it?

CREUSA
Honour! Why this? Would I had never seen it!

ION
Why? Dost thou hate the place dear to the god?

CREUSA
No: but for some base deed done in the cave.

ION
But what Athenian, lady, wedded thee?

CREUSA
Of Athens none, but one of foreign birth.

ION
What is his name? Noble he needs must be.

CREUSA
Xuthus, by Aeolus derived from Jove.

ION
How weds a stranger an Athenian born?

CREUSA
Euboea is a state neighbouring on Athens.

ION
A narrow sea flows, I have heard, between.

CREUSA
Joining the Athenian arms, that state he wasted.

ION
Confederate in the war, thence wedded thee?

CREUSA
The dowral meed of war, earn'd by his spear.

ION
Comest thou with him to Delphi, or alone?

CREUSA
With him, gone now to the Trophonian shrine.

ION
To view it, or consult the oracle?

CREUSA
Both that and this, anxious for one response.

ION
For the earth's fruits consult you, or for children?

CREUSA
Though wedded long, yet childless is our bed.

ION
Hast thou ne'er borne a child, that thou hast none?

CREUSA
My state devoid of children Phoebus knows.

ION
Bless'd in all else, luckless in this alone.

CREUSA
But who art thou? Bless'd I pronounce thy mother.

ION
Call'd as I am the servant of the god.

CREUSA
Presented by some state, or sold to this?

ION
I know not aught save this, I am the god's.

CREUSA
And in my turn, stranger, I pity thee.

ION
As knowing not my mother, or my lineage.

CREUSA
Hast thou thy dwelling here, or in some house?

ION
The temple is my house, ev'n when I sleep.

CREUSA
A child brought hither, or in riper years?

ION
An infant, as they say, who seem to know.

CREUSA
What Delphian dame sustain'd thee at her breast?

ION
I never knew a breast. She nourish'd me.

CREUSA
Who, hapless youth? Diseased, I find disease.

ION
The priestess: as a mother I esteem her.

CREUSA
Who to these manly years gave thee support?

ION
The altars, and the still-succeeding strangers.

CREUSA
Wretched, whoe'er she be, is she that bore thee.

ION
I to some woman am perchance a shame.

CREUSA
Are riches thine? Thou art well habited.

ION
Graced with these vestments by the god I serve.

CREUSA
Hast thou made no attempt to trace thy birth?

ION
I have no token, lady, for a proof.

CREUSA
Ah, like thy mother doth another suffer.

ION
Who? tell me: shouldst thou help me, what a joy!

CREUSA
One for whose sake I come before my husband.

ION
Say for what end, that I may serve thee, lady.

CREUSA
To ask a secret answer of the god.

ION
Speak it: my service shall procure the rest.

CREUSA
Hear then the tale: but Modesty restrains me.

ION
Ah, let her not; her power avails not here.

CREUSA
My friend then says that to the embrace of Phoebus—

ION
A woman and a god! Say not so, stranger.

CREUSA
She bore a son: her father knew it not.

ION
Not so: a mortal's baseness he disdains.

CREUSA
This she affirms; and this, poor wretch, she suffer'd.

ION
What follow'd, if she knew the god's embrace?

CREUSA
The child, which hence had birth, she straight exposed.

ION
This exposed child, where is he? doth he live?

CREUSA
This no one knows; this wish I to inquire.

ION
If not alive, how probably destroyed?

CREUSA
Torn, she conjectures, by some beast of prey.

ION
What ground hath she on which to build that thought?

CREUSA
Returning to the place she found him not.

ION
Observed she drops of blood distain the path?

CREUSA
None, though with anxious heed she search'd around.

ION
What time hath pass'd since thus the child was lost?

CREUSA
Were he alive, his youth were such as thine.

ION
The god hath done him wrong: the unhappy mother—

CREUSA
Hath not to any child been mother since.

ION
What if in secret Phoebus nurtures him!

CREUSA
Unjust to enjoy alone a common right.

ION
Ah me! this cruel fate accords with mine.

CREUSA
For thee too thy unhappy mother mourns.

ION
Ah, melt me not to griefs I would forget!

CREUSA
I will be silent: but impart thy aid.

ION
Seest thou what most the inquiry will suppress?

CREUSA
And to my wretched friend what is not ill?

ION
How shall the god what he would hide reveal?

CREUSA
As placed on the oracular seat of Greece.

ION
The deed must cause him shame: convict him not.

CREUSA
To the poor sufferer 'tis the cause of grief.

ION
It cannot be; for who shall dare to give
The oracle? With justice would the god,
In his own dome affronted, pour on him
Severest vengeance, who should answer thee.
Desist then, lady: it becomes us ill,
In opposition to the god, to make
Inquiries at his shrine; by sacrifice
Before their altars, or the flight of birds,
Should we attempt to force the unwilling gods
To utter what they wish not, 'twere the excess
Of rudeness; what with violence we urge
'Gainst their consent would to no good avail us:
What their spontaneous grace confers on us,
That, lady, as a blessing we esteem.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

How numberless the ills to mortal man,
And various in their form! One single blessing
By any one through life is scarcely found.

CREUSA

Nor here, nor there, O Phoebus, art thou just
To her; though absent, yet her words are present.
Nor didst thou save thy son, whom it became thee
To save; nor, though a prophet, wilt thou speak
To the sad mother who inquires of thee;
That, if he is no more, to him a tomb
May rise; but, if he lives, that he may bless
His mother's eyes. But even thus behooves us
To omit these things, if by the god denied
To know what most I wish.—But, for I see
The noble Xuthus this way bend, return'd
From the Trophonian cave; before my husband
Resume not, generous stranger, this discourse,
Lest it might cause me shame that thus I act
In secret, and perchance lead on to questions
I would not have explain'd. Our hapless sex
Oft feel our husbands' rigour: with the bad
The virtuous they confound, and treat us harshly.

(XUTHUS *and his retinue enter.*)

XUTHUS

With reverence to the god my first address
I pay: Hail, Phoebus! Lady, next to thee:
Absent so long, have I not caused thee fear?

CREUSA

Not much: as anxious thoughts 'gan rise, thou'rt come.
But, tell me, from Trophonius what reply
Bearest thou; what means whence offspring may arise?

XUTHUS

Unmeet he held it to anticipate
The answer of the god: one thing he told me.
That childless I should not return, nor thou,
Home from the oracle.

CREUSA

Goddess revered,
Mother of Phoebus, be our coming hither
In lucky hour; and our connubial bed
Be by thy son made happier than before!

XUTHUS

It shall be so. But who is president here?

ION

Without, that charge is mine; within, devolved
On others, stranger, seated near the tripod;
The chiefs of Delphi these, chosen by lot.

XUTHUS

'Tis well: all that I want is then complete.
Let me now enter: for the oracle
Is given, I hear, in common to all strangers
Before the shrine; on such a day, that falls
Propitious thus, the answer of the god
Would I receive: meanwhile, these laurel boughs
Bear round the altars; lady, breathe thy prayers
To every god, that from Apollo's shrine
I may bring back the promise of a son.
(XUTHUS, *after giving the laurel boughs to* CREUSA, *enters the temple.*)

CREUSA

It shall, it shall be so. Should Phoebus now
At least be willing to redress the fault
Of former times, he would not through the whole
Be friendly to us: yet will I accept
What he vouchsafes us, for he is a god.
(CREUSA *departs to the shrines in the outer precinct of the temple.*)

ION [2]

Why does this stranger always thus revile
With obscure speech the god? Is it through love
Of her, for whom she asks? or to conceal
Some secret of importance? But to me
What is the daughter of Erechtheus? Naught
Concerns it me. Then let me to my task,
And sprinkle from the golden vase the dew.
Yet must I blame the god, if thus perforce
He mounts the bed of virgins, and by stealth

Becomes a father, leaving then his children
To die, regardless of them. Do not thou
Act thus; but, as thy power is great, respect
The virtues; for whoe'er, of mortal men,
Dares impious deeds, him the gods punish: how
Is it then just that you, who gave the laws
To mortals, should yourselves transgress those laws?
If (though it is not thus, yet will I urge
The subject),—if to mortals you shall pay
The penalty of forced embraces, thou,
Neptune, and Jove, that reigns supreme in heaven,
Will leave your temples treasureless by paying
The mulcts of your injustice: for unjust
You are, your pleasures to grave temperance
Preferring: and to men these deeds no more
Can it be just to charge as crimes, these deeds
If from the gods they imitate: on those
Who gave the ill examples falls the charge.
(Ion *goes out.*)

Chorus (*singing*)

strophe

Thee prompt to yield thy lenient aid,
And sooth a mother's pain:
And thee, my Pallas, martial maid,
I call: O, hear the strain!
Thou, whom the Titan from the head of Jove,
Prometheus, drew, bright Victory, come,
Descending from thy golden throne above;
Haste, goddess, to the Pythian dome,
Where Phoebus, from his central shrine,
Gives the oracle divine,
By the raving maid repeated,
On the hallow'd tripod seated:
O haste thee, goddess, and with thee
The daughter of Latona bring;
A virgin thou, a virgin she,
Sisters to the Delphian king;
Him, virgins, let your vows implore,
That now his pure oracular power
Will to Erechtheus' ancient line declare
The blessing of a long-expected heir!

antistrophe

To mortal man this promised grace
Sublimest pleasure brings,
When round the father's hearth a race
In blooming lustre springs.
The wealth, the honours, from their high-drawn line
From sire to son transmitted down,
Shall with fresh glory through their offspring shine,
And brighten with increased renown:
A guard, when ills begin to lower,
Dear in fortune's happier hour;
For their country's safety waking,
Firm in fight the strong spear shaking;
More than proud wealth's exhaustless store,
More than a monarch's bride to reign,
The dear delight, to virtue's lore
Careful the infant mind to train.
Doth any praise the childless state?
The joyless, loveless life I hate;
No; my desires to moderate wealth I bound,
But let me see my children smile around.

epode

Ye rustic seats, Pan's dear delight;
Ye caves of Macrai's rocky height,
Where oft the social virgins meet,
And weave the dance with nimble feet;
Descendants from Aglauros they
In the third line, with festive play,
Minerva's hallow'd fane before
The verdant plain light-tripping o'er,
When thy pipe's quick-varying sound
Rings, O Pan, these caves around;
Where, by Apollo's love betray'd,
Her child some hapless mother laid,
Exposed to each night-prowling beast,
Or to the ravenous birds a feast;
For never have I heard it told,
Nor wrought it in historic gold,
That happiness attends the race,
When gods with mortals mix the embrace.

(Ion *re-enters.*)

ION

Ye female train, that place yourselves around
This incense-breathing temple's base, your lord
Awaiting, hath he left the sacred tripod
And oracle, or stays he in the shrine,
Making inquiries of his childless state?

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Yet in the temple, stranger, he remains.

ION

But he comes forth; the sounding doors announce
His near approach; behold, our lord is here.
(XUTHUS *enters from the temple. He rushes to greet* ION.)

XUTHUS

Health to my son! This first address is proper.

ION

I have my health: be in thy senses thou,
And both are well.

XUTHUS

O let me kiss thy hand,
And throw mine arms around thee.

ION

Art thou, stranger,
Well in thy wits? or hath the god's displeasure
Bereft thee of thy reason?

XUTHUS

Reason bids,
That which is dearest being found, to wish
A fond embrace.

ION

Off, touch me not; thy hands
Will mar the garlands of the god.

XUTHUS

My touch
Asserts no pledge: my own, and that most dear,
I find.

ION

Wilt thou not keep thee distant, ere
Thou hast my arrow in thy heart?

XUTHUS

Why fly me,
When thou shouldst own what is most fond of thee?

ION

I am not fond of curing wayward strangers,
And madmen.

XUTHUS

Kill me, raise my funeral pyre;
But, if thou kill me, thou wilt kill thy father.

ION

My father thou! how so? it makes me laugh
To hear thee.

XUTHUS

This my words may soon explain.

ION

What wilt thou say to me?

XUTHUS

I am thy father,
And thou my son.

ION

Who declares this?

XUTHUS

The god,
That nurtured thee, though mine.

ION

Thou to thyself
Art witness.

XUTHUS

By the oracle inform'd.

ION

Misled by some dark answer.

XUTHUS
Well I heard it.

ION
What were the words of Phoebus?

XUTHUS
That who first
Should meet me—

ION
How?—what meeting?

XUTHUS
As I pass'd
Forth from the temple.

ION
What the event to him?

XUTHUS
He is my son.

ION
Born so, or by some other
Presented?

XUTHUS
Though a present, born my son.

ION
And didst thou first meet me?

XUTHUS
None else, my son.

ION
This fortune whence?

XUTHUS
At that we marvel both.

ION
Who is my mother?

XUTHUS
That I cannot say.

ION

Did not the god inform thee?

XUTHUS

Through my joy,
For this I ask'd not.

ION

Haply from the earth
I sprung, my mother.

XUTHUS

No, the earth no sons
Produces.

ION

How then am I thine?

XUTHUS

I know not.
To Phoebus I appeal.

ION

Be this discourse
Chang'd to some other.

XUTHUS

This delights me most.

ION

Hast thou e'er mounted an unlawful bed?

XUTHUS

In foolishness of youth.

ION

Was that before
Thy marriage with the daughter of Erechtheus?

XUTHUS

Since never.

ION

Owe I then my birth to that?

XUTHUS

The time agrees.

ION
How came I hither then?

XUTHUS
I can form no conjecture.

ION
Was I brought
From some far distant part?

XUTHUS
That fills my mind
With doubtful musing.

ION
Didst thou e'er before
Visit the Pythian rock?

XUTHUS
Once, at the feast
Of Bacchus.

ION
By some public host received?

XUTHUS
Who with the Delphian damsels—

ION
To the orgies
Led thee, or how?

XUTHUS
And with the Maenades
Of Bacchus—

ION
In the temperate hour, or warm
With wine?

XUTHUS
Amid the revels of the god.

ION
From thence I date my birth.

XUTHUS

And fate, my son,
Hath found thee.

ION

How then came I to the temple?

XUTHUS

Perchance exposed.

ION

The state of servitude
Have I escaped.

XUTHUS

Thy father now, my son,
Receive.

ION

Indecent were it in the god
Not to confide.

XUTHUS

Thy thoughts are just.

ION

What else
Would we?

XUTHUS

Thou seest what thou oughtst to see.

ION

Am I the son then of the son of Jove?

XUTHUS

Such is thy fortune.

ION

Those that gave me birth
Do I embrace?

XUTHUS

Obedient to the god.

ION

My father, hail!

XUTHUS
That dear name I accept
With joy.

ION
This present day—

XUTHUS
Hath made me happy.

ION
O my dear mother, when shall I behold
Thy face? Whoe'er thou art, more wish I now
To see thee than before; but thou perchance
Art dead, and nothing our desires avail.

LEADER
We in the blessing of our house rejoice.
Yet wish we that our mistress too were happy
In children, and the lineage of Erechtheus.

XUTHUS
Well hath the god accomplish'd this, my son,
Discovering thee, well hath he joined thee to me;
And thou hast found the most endearing ties,
To which, before this hour, thou wast a stranger.
And the warm wish, which thou hast well conceived,
Is likewise mine, that thou mayst find thy mother;
I from what woman thou derivest thy birth.
This, left to time, may haply be discover'd.
Now quit this hallow'd earth, the god no more
Attending, and to mine accord thy mind,
To visit Athens, where thy father's sceptre,
No mean one, waits thee, and abundant wealth:
Nor, though thou grieve one parent yet unknown,
Shalt thou be censured as ignobly born,
Or poor: no, thou art noble, and thy state
Adorn'd with rich possessions. Thou art silent.
Why is thine eye thus fixed upon the ground?
Why on thy brow that cloud? The smile of joy
Vanish'd, thou strikest thy father's heart with fear.

ION
Far other things appear when nigh, than seen
At distance. I indeed embrace my fortune,

In thee my father found. But hear what now
Wakes sad reflections. Proud of their high race
Are your Athenians, natives of the land,
Not drawn from foreign lineage: I to them
Shall come unwelcome, in two points defective,
My father not a native, and myself
Of spurious birth: loaded with this reproach,
If destitute of power, I shall be held
Abject and worthless: should I rush among
The highest order of the state, and wish
To appear important, inferior ranks
Will hate me; aught above them gives disgust.
The good, the wise, men form'd to serve the state,
Are silent, nor at public honours aim
Too hastily: by such, were I not quiet
In such a bustling state, I should be deem'd
Ridiculous, and proverb'd for a fool.
Should I attain the dignity of those,
Whose approved worth hath raised them to the height
Of public honours, by such suffrage more
Should I be watch'd; for they that hold in states
Rule and pre-eminence, bear hostile minds
To all that vie with them. And should I come
To a strange house a stranger, to a woman
Childless herself, who that misfortune shared
Before with thee, now sees it her sole lot,
And feels it bitterly, would she not hate me,
And that with justice? When I stand before thee,
With what an eye would she, who hath no child,
Look on thy child? In tenderness to her,
Thy wife, thou must forsake me, or embroil
Thy house in discord, if thou favour me.
What murderous means, what poisonous drugs for men
Have women with inventive rage prepared!
Besides, I have much pity for thy wife,
Now growing old without a child, that grief
Unmerited, the last of her high race,
The exterior face indeed of royalty,
So causelessly commended, hath its brightness;
Within, all gloom: for what sweet peace of mind,
What happiness is his, whose years are pass'd
In comfortless suspicion, and the dread
Of violence? Be mine the humble blessings

Of private life, rather than be a king,
From the flagitious forced to choose my friends,
And hate the virtuous through the fear of death.
Gold, thou mayst tell me, hath o'er things like these
A sovereign power, and riches give delight:
I have no pleasure in this noisy pomp,
Nor, while I guard my riches, in the toil:
Be mine a modest mean that knows not care.
And now, my father, hear the happy state
I here enjoy'd; and first, to mortal man
That dearest blessing, leisure, and no bustle
To cause disturbance: me no ruffian force
Shoved from the way: it is not to be borne,
When every insolent and worthless wretch
Makes you give place. The worship of the god
Employ'd my life, or (no unpleasing task)
Service to men well pleased: the parting guest
I bade farewell—welcomed the new-arrived.
Thus something always new made every hour
Glide sweetly on; and to the human mind
That dearest wish, though some regard it not,
To be, what duty and my nature made me,
Just to the god: revolving this, my father,
I wish not for thy Athens to exchange
This state; permit me to myself to live;
Dear to the mind pleasures that arise
From humble life, as those which greatness brings.

LEADER

Well hast thou said, if those whom my soul holds
Most dear shall in thy words find happiness.

XUTHUS

No more of this discourse; learn to be happy.
It is my will that thou begin it here,
Where first I found thee, son; a general feast
Will I provide, and make a sacrifice,
Which at thy birth I made not: at my table
Will I receive thee as a welcome guest,
And cheer thee with the banquet, then conduct thee
To Athens with me as a visitant,
Not as my son: for, mid my happiness,
I would not grieve my wife, who hath no child.

But I will watch the occasions time may bring,
And so present thee, and obtain her leave
That thou mayst hold the sceptre which I bear.
Ion I name thee, as befits thy fortune,
As first thou met'st me from the hallow'd shrine
As I came forth; assemble then thy friends,
Invite them all to share the joyful feast,
Since thou art soon to leave the Delphic state.
And you, ye females, keep, I charge you, keep
This secret; she that tells my wife shall die.

ION

Let us then go; yet one thing to my fortune
Is wanting: if I find not her that bore me,
Life hath no joy. Might I indulge a wish,
It were to find her an Athenian dame,
That from my mother I might dare to assume
Some confidence; for he whose fortune leads him
To a free state proud of their unmix'd race,
Though call'd a citizen, must close his lips
With servile awe, for freedom is not his.

(XUTHUS *and* ION *go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe

Yes, sisters, yes, the streaming eye,
The swelling heart I see, the bursting sigh,
When thus rejoicing in his son
Our queen her royal lord shall find,
And give to grief her anguish'd mind,
Afflicted, childless, and alone.
What means this voice divine,
Son of Latona, fate-declaring power?
Whence is this youth, so fondly graced,
That to ripe manhood, from his infant hour,
Hath in thy hallow'd courts been plac'd
And nurtured at thy shrine?
Thy dark reply delights not me;
Lurking beneath close fraud I see:
Where will this end? I fear, I fear—
'Tis strange, and strange events must hence ensue:
But grateful sounds it to his ear,
The youth, that in another's state

(Who sees not that my words are true?)
Enjoys the fraud, and triumphs in his fate.

antistrophe

Say, sisters, say, with duteous zeal
Shall we this secret to our queen reveal?
She, to her royal lord resign'd,
With equal hope, with equal care,
Form'd her his joys, his griefs to share,
And gave him all her willing mind.
But joys are his alone;
While she, poor mourner, with a weight of woes,
To hoary age advancing, bends;
He the bright smile of prosperous fortune knows.
Ev'n thus, unhonour'd by his friends,
Plac'd on another's throne,
Mischance and ruin on him wait,
Who fails to guard its happy state.
Him may mischance and ruin seize,
Who round my lov'd queen spreads his wily trains.
No god may his oblation please,
No favouring flame to him ascend!
To her my faith, my zeal remains,
Known to her ancient royal house a friend.

epode

Now the father and the new-found son
The festive table haste to spread,
Where to the skies Parnassus lifts his head,
And deep beneath the hanging stone
Forms in its rudely-rifted side
A cavern wild and wide;
Where Bacchus, shaking high his midnight flames,
In many a light fantastic round
Dances o'er the craggy ground,
And revels with his frantic dames.
Ne'er to my city let him come,
This youth: no, rather let him die,
And sink into an early tomb!
With an indignant eye
Athens would view the stranger's pride
Within her gates triumphant ride:
Enough for her the honour'd race that springs
From old Erechtheus and her line of kings.

(CREUSA *and her aged* TUTOR *enter.*)

CREUSA

Thou venerable man, whose guiding voice
My father, while he lived, revered, advance
Up to the oracular seat thy aged steps;
That, if the royal Phoebus should pronounce
Promise of offspring, thou with me mayst share
The joy; for pleasing is it when with friends
Good fortune we receive; if aught of ill
(Avert it, Heaven!) befalls, a friend's kind eye
Beams comfort; thee, as once thou didst revere
My father, though thy queen, I now revere.

TUTOR

In thee, my child, the nobleness of manners
Which graced thy royal ancestors yet lives;
Thou never wilt disgrace thy high-born lineage.
Lead me, then, lead me to the shrine, support me:
High is the oracular seat, and steep the ascent;
Be thou assistant to the foot of age.

CREUSA

Follow; be heedful where thou set thy steps.

TUTOR

I am: my foot is slow, my heart hath wings.

CREUSA

Fix thy staff firm on this loose-rolling ground.

TUTOR

That hath no eyes; and dim indeed my sight.

CREUSA

Well hast thou said; on cheerful then, and faint not.

TUTOR

I have the will, but o'er constraint no power.

CREUSA

Ye females, on my richly-broider'd works
Faithful attendants, say, respecting children,
For which we came, what fortune hath my lord
Borne hence? if good, declare it: you shall find
That to no thankless masters you give joy.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

O fortune!

CREUSA

To thy speech this is a proem
Not tuned to happiness.

LEADER

Unhappy fortune!
But why distress me for the oracle
Given to our lords? Be that as fate requires
In things which threaten death, what shall we do?

CREUSA

What means this strain of woe? Whence are these fears?

LEADER

What! shall we speak, or bury this in silence?

CREUSA

Speak, though thy words bring wretchedness to me.

LEADER

It shall be spoken, were I twice to die.
To thee, my queen, it is not given to clasp
In thy fond arms a child, or at thy breast
To hold it.

TUTOR

O my child, would I were dead!

CREUSA

Yes, this is wretchedness indeed, a grief
That makes life joyless.

TUTOR

This is ruin to us.

CREUSA

Unhappy me! this is a piercing grief,
That rends my heart with anguish.

TUTOR

Groan not yet.

CREUSA

Yet is the affliction present.

TUTOR
Till we learn—

CREUSA
To me what tidings?

TUTOR
If a common fate
Await our lord, partaker of thy griefs,
Or thou alone art thus unfortunate.

LEADER
To him, old man, the god hath given a son,
And happiness is his unknown to her.

CREUSA
To ill this adds the deepest ill, a grief
For me to mourn.

TUTOR
Born of some other woman
Is this child yet to come, or did the god
Declare one now in being?

LEADER
One advanced
To manhood's prime he gave him: I was present.

CREUSA
What hast thou said? Thy words denounce to me
Sorrows past speech, past utterance.

TUTOR
And to me.

CREUSA
How was this oracle accomplish'd? Tell me
With clearest circumstance: who is this youth?

LEADER
Him as a son Apollo gave, whom first,
Departing from the god, thy lord should meet.

CREUSA
O my unhappy fate! I then am left
Childless to pass my life, childless, alone,
Amid my lonely house! Who was declared?

Whom did the husband of this wretch first meet?
How meet him? Where behold him? Tell me all.

LEADER

Dost thou, my honoured mistress, call to mind
The youth that swept the temple? This is he.

CREUSA

O, through the liquid air that I could fly,
Far from the land of Greece, ev'n to the stars
Fix'd in the western sky! Ah me, what grief,
What piercing grief is mine!

TUTOR

Say, by what name
Did he address his son, if thou hast heard it?
Or does it rest in silence, yet unknown?

LEADER

Ion, for that he first advanced to meet him.

TUTOR

And of what mother?

LEADER

That I could not learn:
Abrupt was his departure (to inform thee
Of all I know, old man) to sacrifice,
With hospitable rites, a birthday feast;
And in the hallow'd cave, from her apart,
With his new son to share the common banquet.

TUTOR

Lady, we by thy husband are betrayed,
For I with thee am grieved, with contrived fraud
Insulted, from thy father's house cast forth.
I speak not this in hatred to thy lord,
But that I love thee more: a stranger he
Came to the city and thy royal house,
And wedded thee, all thy inheritance
Receiving, by some other woman now
Discover'd to have children privately:
How privately I'll tell thee: when he saw
Thou hadst no child, it pleased him not to bear
A fate like thine; but by some favourite slave,

His paramour by stealth, he hath a son.
Him to some Delphian gave he, distant far,
To educate; who to this sacred house
Consign'd, as secret here, received his nurture.
He knowing this, and that his son advanced
To manhood, urged thee to attend him hither,
Pleading thy childless state. Nor hath the god
Deceived thee: he deceived thee, and long since
Contrived this wily plan to rear his son,
That, if convicted, he might charge the god,
Himself excusing: should the fraud succeed,
He would observe the times when he might safely
Consign to him the empire of thy land.
And this new name was at his leisure form'd,
Ion, for that he came by chance to meet him.
I hate those ill-designing men, that form
Plans of injustice, and then gild them over
With artificial ornament: to me
Far dearer is the honest simple friend,
Than one whose quicker wit is train'd to ill.
And to complete this fraud, thou shalt be urged
To take into thy house, to lord it there,
This low-born youth, this offspring of a slave.
Though ill, it had been open, had he pleaded
Thy want of children, and, thy leave obtain'd,
Brought to thy house a son that could have boasted
His mother noble; or, if that displeased thee,
He might have sought a wife from Aeolus.
Behooves thee then to act a woman's part,
Or grasp the sword, or drug the poison'd bowl,
Or plan some deep design to kill thy husband,
And this his son, before thou find thy death
From them: if thou delay, thy life is lost:
For when beneath one roof two foes are met,
The one must perish. I with ready zeal
Will aid thee in this work, and kill the youth,
Entering the grot where he prepares the feast;
Indifferent in my choice, so that I pay
What to my lords I owe, to live or die.
If there is aught that causes slaves to blush,
It is the name; in all else than the free
The slave is nothing worse, if he be virtuous.

LEADER

I too, my honour'd queen, with cheerful mind
Will share thy fate, or die, or live with honour.

CREUSA (*chanting*)

How, O my soul, shall I be silent, how
Disclose this secret? Can I bid farewell
To modesty? What else restrains my tongue?
To how severe a trial am I brought!
Hath not my husband wrong'd me? Of my house
I am deprived, deprived of children; hope
Is vanish'd, which my heart could not resign,
With many an honest wish this furtive bed
Concealing, this lamented bed concealing.
But by the star-bespangled throne of Jove,
And by the goddess high above my rocks
Enshrined, by the moist banks that bend around
The hallow'd lake by Triton form'd, no longer
Will I conceal this bed, but ease my breast,
The oppressive load discharged. Mine eyes drop tears,
My soul is rent, to wretchedness ensnared
By men, by gods, whom I will now disclose,
Unkind betrayers of the beds they forced.
O thou, that wakest on thy seven-string'd lyre
Sweet notes, that from the rustic lifeless horn
Enchant the ear with heavenly melody,
Son of Latona, thee before this light
Will I reprove. Thou camest to me, with gold
Thy locks all glittering, as the vermeil flowers
I gather'd in my vest to deck my bosom
With the spring's glowing hues; in my white hand
Thy hand enlocking, to the cavern'd rock
Thou led'st me; naught avail'd my cries, that call'd
My mother; on thou led'st me, wanton god,
Immodestly, to Venus paying homage.
A son I bare thee, O my wretched fate!
Him (for I fear'd my mother) in thy cave
I placed, where I unhappy was undone
By thy unhappy love. Woe, woe is me!
And now my son and thine, ill-fated babe,
Is rent by ravenous vultures; thou, meanwhile,
Art to thy lyre attuning strains of joy.
Son of Latona, thee I call aloud,

Who from thy golden seat, thy central throne,
Utterest thine oracle: my voice shall reach
Thine ear: ungrateful lover, to my husband,
No grace requiting, thou hast given a son
To bless his house; my son and thine, unown'd,
Perish'd a prey to birds; the robes that wrapp'd
The infant's limbs, his mother's work, lost with him.
Delos abhors thee, and the laurel boughs
With the soft foliage of the palm o'erhung,
Grasping whose round trunk with her hands divine,
Latona thee, her hallow'd offspring, bore.

LEADER

Ah, what a mighty treasury of ills
Is open'd here, a copious source of tears!

TUTOR

Never, my daughter, can I sate my eyes
With looking on thy face: astonishment
Bears me beyond my senses. I had stemm'd
One tide of evils, when another flood
High-surging overwhelm'd me from the words
Which thou hast utter'd, from the present ills
To an ill train of other woes transferr'd.
What say'st thou? Of what charge dost thou implead
The god? What son hast thou brought forth? Where placed him
A feast for vultures? Tell me all again.

CREUSA

Though I must blush, old man, yet I will speak.

TUTOR

I mourn with generous grief at a friend's woes.

CREUSA

Hear then: the northward-pointing cave thou knowest,
And the Cecropian rocks, which we call Macrai.

TUTOR

Where stands a shrine to Pan, and altars nigh.

CREUSA

There in a dreadful conflict I engaged.

TUTOR

What! my tears rise ready to meet thy words.

CREUSA
By Phoebus drawn reluctant to his bed.

TUTOR
Was this, my daughter, such as I suppose?

CREUSA
I know not: but if truth, I will confess it.

TUTOR
Didst thou in silence mourn this secret ill?

CREUSA
This was the grief I now disclose to thee.

TUTOR
This love of Phoebus how didst thou conceal?

CREUSA
I bore a son. Hear me, old man, with patience.

TUTOR
Where? who assisted? or wast thou alone?

CREUSA
Alone, in the same cave where compress'd.

TUTOR
Where is thy son, that childless now no more—

CREUSA
Dead, good old man, to beasts of prey exposed.

TUTOR
Dead! and the ungrateful Phoebus gives no aid?

CREUSA
None: in the house of Pluto a young guest.

TUTOR
Whose hands exposed him? Surely not thine own.

CREUSA
Mine, in the shades of night, wrapp'd in his vests.

TUTOR
Hadst thou none with thee conscious to this deed?

CREUSA
My misery, and the secret place alone.

TUTOR
How durst thou in a cavern leave thy son?

CREUSA
How? uttering many sad and plaintive words.

TUTOR
Ah, cruel was thy deed, the god more cruel.

CREUSA
Hadst thou but seen him stretch his little hands!

TUTOR
Seeking the breast, or reaching to thine arms?

CREUSA
To this, deprived of which he suffer'd wrong.

TUTOR
And what induced thee to expose thy child?

CREUSA
Hope that the god's kind care would save his son.

TUTOR
How are the glories of thy house destroy'd!

CREUSA
Why, thine head cover'd, dost thou pour these tears?

TUTOR
To see thee and thy father thus unhappy.

CREUSA
This is the state of man: nothing stands firm.

TUTOR
No longer then, my child, let grief oppress us.

CREUSA
What should I do? In misery all is doubt.

TUTOR
First on the god that wrong'd thee be avenged.

CREUSA
How shall a mortal 'gainst a god prevail?

TUTOR
Set this revered oracular shrine on fire.

CREUSA
I fear: ev'n now I have enough of ills.

TUTOR
Attempt what may be done then; kill thy husband.

CREUSA
The nuptial bed I reverence, and his goodness.

TUTOR
This son then, which is now brought forth against thee.

CREUSA
How? Could that be, how warmly should I wish it.

TUTOR
Thy train hath swords: instruct them to the deed.

CREUSA
I go with speed: but where shall it be done?

TUTOR
In the hallow'd tent, where now he feasts his friends.

CREUSA
An open murder, and with coward slaves!

TUTOR
If mine displease, propose thou some design.

CREUSA
I have it, close and easy to achieve.

TUTOR
In both my faithful services are thine.

CREUSA
Hear then: not strange to thee the giants' war.

TUTOR
When they in Phlegra fought against the gods.

CREUSA
There the earth brought forth the Gorgon, horrid monster.

TUTOR
In succour of her sons to annoy the gods?

CREUSA
Ev'n so: her Pallas slew, daughter of Jove.

TUTOR
What fierce and dreadful form did she then wear?

CREUSA
Her breastplate arm'd with vipers wreathed around.

TUTOR
A well-known story; often have I heard it.

CREUSA
Her spoils before her breast Minerva wore.

TUTOR
The aegis; so they call the vest of Pallas.

CREUSA
So named, when in the war she join'd the gods.

TUTOR
But how can this, my child, annoy thy foes?

CREUSA
Thou canst not but remember Erichthonius.

TUTOR
Whom first of thy high race the earth brought forth.

CREUSA
To him while yet an infant Pallas gave—

TUTOR
What? Thy slow preface raises expectation.

CREUSA
Two drops of blood that from the Gorgon fell.

TUTOR
And on the human frame what power have these?

CREUSA
The one works death, the other heals disease.

TUTOR
In what around the infant's body hung?

CREUSA
Enclosed in gold: he gave them to my father.

TUTOR
At his decease then they devolved to thee?

CREUSA
Ay, and I wear it as a bracelet; look.

TUTOR
Their double qualities how temper'd, say.

CREUSA
This drop, which from her hollow vein distill'd,—

TUTOR
To what effect applied? What is its power?

CREUSA
Medicinal, of sovereign use to life.

TUTOR
The other drop, what faculties hath that?

CREUSA
It kills, the poison of the Gorgon dragons.

TUTOR
And dost thou bear this gore blended in one?

CREUSA
No, separate; for with ill good mixes not.

TUTOR
O my dear child, thou hast whate'er we want.

CREUSA
With this the boy shall die, and thou shalt kill him.

TUTOR
Where? How? 'Tis thine to speak, to dare be mine.

CREUSA
At Athens, when he comes beneath my roof.

TUTOR
I like not this; what I proposed displeased.

CREUSA
Dost thou surmise what enters now my thoughts?

TUTOR
Suspicion waits thee, though thou kill him not.

CREUSA
Thou hast judged well: a stepdame's hate is proverb'd.

TUTOR
Then kill him here; thou mayst disown the deed.

CREUSA
My mind ev'n now anticipates the pleasure.

TUTOR
Thus shalt thou meet thy husband's wiles with wiles.

CREUSA
This shalt thou do: this little golden casket
Take from my hand, Minerva's gift of old;
To where my husband secretly prepares
The sacrifice, bear this beneath thy vest.
That supper ended, when they are to pour
Libations to the gods, thou mayst infuse
In the youth's goblet this: but take good heed,
Let none observe thee; drug his cup alone
Who thinks to lord it in my house: if once
It pass his lips, his foot shall never reach
Illustrious Athens: death awaits him here.
(*She gives him the casket.*)

TUTOR
Go thou then to the hospitable house
Prepared for thy reception: be it mine,
Obedient to thy word to do this deed.
Come then, my aged foot, be once more young
In act, though not in years, for past recall
That time is fled: kill him, and bear him forth.
Well may the prosperous harbour virtuous thought;

But when thou wouldst avenge thee on thy foes,
There is no law of weight to hinder thee.

(*They both go out.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)

strophe 1

Daughter of Ceres, Trivia hear,
Propitious regent of each public way
Amid the brightness of the day,
Nor less when night's dark hour engenders fear;
The fulness of this goblet guide
To check with death this stripling's pride,
For whom my queen this fatal draught prepares,
Tinged with the Gorgon's venom'd gore:
That seat, which mid Erechtheus' royal heirs
His pride claims, it shall claim no more:
Never may one of alien blood disgrace
The imperial honours of that high-born race!

antistrophe 1

Should not this work of fate succeed,
Nor the just vengeance of my queen prevail;
Should this apt time of daring fail,
And hope, that flatters now, desert the deed;
Slaughter shall other means afford,
The strangling cord, the piercing sword;
For rage from disappointed rage shall flow,
And try each various form of death;
For never shall my queen this torment know;
Ne'er while she draws this vital breath,
Brook in her house that foreign lords should shine,
Clothed with the splendours of her ancient line.

strophe 2

Thou whom the various hymn delights,
Then thy bright choir of beauteous dames among,
Dancing the stream's soft brink along,
Thou seest the guardian of thy mystic rites,
Thy torch its midnight vigils keep,
Thine eye meantime disdaining sleep;
While with thee dances Jove's star-spangled plain,
And the moon dances up the sky:
Ye nymphs, that lead to grots your frolic train,
Beneath the gulfy founts that lie;

Thou gold-crown'd queen, through night's dark regions fear'd,
And thou, her mother, power revered,
How should I blush to see this youth unknown!
This Delphic vagrant, hope to seize the throne.

antistrophe 2

You, who the melting soul to move,
In loose, dishonest airs the Muse employ
To celebrate love's wanton joy,
The joy of unallow'd, unholy love,
See how our pure and modest law
Can lavish man's lewd deeds o'erawe!
Ye shameless bards, revoke each wanton air;
No more these melting measures frame;
Bid the chaste muse in Virtue's cause declare,
And mark man's lawless bed with shame!
Ungrateful is this Jove-descended lord;
For, his wife's childless bed abhorr'd,
Lewdly he courts the embrace of other dames,
And with a spurious son his pride inflames.

(*An* ATTENDANT *of* CREUSA *enters.*)

ATTENDANT

Athenian dames, where shall I find our queen,
The daughter of Erechtheus? Seeking her,
This city have I walked around in vain.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

And for what cause, my fellow-slave? What means
Thy hasty foot? What tidings dost thou bring?

ATTENDANT

We are discover'd; and the rulers here
Seek her, that she may die o'erwhelm'd with stones.

LEADER

Ah me! what wouldst thou say? Are our designs
Of secret ruin to this youth disclosed?

ATTENDANT

They are; and know, the worst of ills await you.

LEADER

How were our dark devices brought to light?

ATTENDANT

The god, that justice might receive no stain
Caused it to triumph o'er defeated wrong.

LEADER

How? as a suppliant, I conjure thee, tell me
Of this inform'd, if we must die, more freely
Wish we to die than see the light of heaven.

ATTENDANT

Soon as the husband of Creusa left
The god's oracular shrine, this new-found son
He to the feast, and sacrifice prepared
To the high gods, led with him. Xuthus then
Went where the hallow'd flame of Bacchus mounts,
That on each rock's high point the victim's blood
Might flow, a grateful offering for his son
Thus recognised, to whom he gave in charge,
"Stay thou, and with the artist's expert aid
Erect the sheltering tent: my rites perform'd
To the kind gods that o'er the genial bed
Preside, should I be there detain'd too long,
Spread the rich table to my present friends."
This said, he led the victims to the rocks.
Meanwhile with reverent heed the son 'gan rear
On firm supporters the wide tent, whose sides
No masonry require, yet framed to exclude
The mid-day sun's hot beams, or his last rays
When sinking in the west: the lengthen'd lines
Equally distant comprehend a square
Of twice five thousand feet (the skilful thus
Compute it), space to feast (for so he will'd)
All Delphi: from the treasures of the god
He took the sacred tapestry, and around
Hung the rich shade, on which the admiring eye
Gazes with fix'd delight: [3] first over head,
Like a broad pennon spread the extended woof,
Which from the Amazonian spoils the son
Of Jove, Alcides, hallow'd to the god;
In its bright texture interwov'n a sky
Gathering the stars in its ethereal round,
While downwards to the western wave the sun
His steeds declines, and to his station high
Draws up the radiant flame of Hesperus.

Meanwhile the Night robed in her sable stole,
Her unreign'd car advances; on her state
The stars attend; the Pleiads mounting high,
And with his glittering sword Orion arm'd;
Above, Arcturus to the golden pole
Inclines; full-orb'd the month-dividing moon
Takes her bright station, and the Hyades
Marked by the sailor: distant in the rear,
Aurora ready to relume the day,
And put the stars to flight. The sides were graced
With various textures of the historic woof,
Barbaric arguments; in gallant trim
Against the fleet of Greece the hostile fleet
Rides proudly on. Here monstrous forms portray'd
Human and brutal mix'd: the Thracian steeds
Are seized, the hinds, and the adventurous chase
Of savage lions: figured nigh the doors,
Cecrops, attended by his daughter's, roll'd
His serpent train: in the ample space within
He spread the festal table, richly deck'd
With golden goblets. Now the herald walk'd
His round, each native that inclined to grace
The feast inviting: to the crowded tent
They hasten, crown'd with garlands, and partake
The exquisite repast. The pleasured sense
Now satiate, in the midst an old man stood,
Officious in his ministry, which raised
Much mirth among the guests; for from the urns
He fill'd the lavers, and with fragrant myrrh
Incensed the place; the golden bowls he claim'd
His charge. When now the jocund pipes 'gan breathe
Harmonious airs, and the fresh goblet stood
Ready to walk its round, the old man said,
"Away with these penurious cups, and bring
Capacious bowls; so shall you quickly bathe
Your spirits in delight." With speed were brought
Goblets of gold and silver: one he took
Of choicer frame; and, seemingly intent
To do his young lord honour, the full vase
Gave to his hands, but in the wine infused
A drug of poisonous power, which, it is said,
His queen supplied, that the new son no more
Might view the light of heav'n; but unobserved

He mix'd it. As the youth among the rest
Pour'd the libation, 'mid the attendant slaves
Words of reproach one utter'd: he, as train'd
Within the temple and with expert seers,
Deem'd them of evil omen, and required
Another goblet to be filled afresh:
The former a libation to the god,
He cast upon the ground, instructing all
To pour, like him, the untasted liquor down.
Silence ensued: the sacred bowls we fill
With wines of Byblos; when a troop of doves
Came fluttering in, for undisturb'd they haunt
The dome of Phoebus: in the floating wine
They dipp'd their bills to drink, then raised their heads,
Gurgling it down their beauteous-plumed throats.
Harmless to all the spilt wine, save to her
That lighted where the youth had pour'd his bowl:
She drank, and straight convulsive shiverings seized
Her beauteous plumes; around in giddy rings
She whirl'd, and in a strange and mournful note
Seem'd to lament: amazement seized the guests,
Seeing the poor bird's pangs: her heart heaved thick,
And stretching out her scarlet legs, she died.
Rending his robes, the son of Phoebus given
Sprung from the table, and aloud exclaim'd,—
"What wretch design'd to kill me? Speak, old man:
Officious was thy ministry; the bowl
I from thy hand received." Then straight he seized
His aged arm, and to the question held him,
As in the fact discover'd: he thus caught,
Reluctant and constrain'd, own'd the bold deed,
The deadly goblet by Creusa drugg'd.
Forth from the tent, the guests attending, rush'd
The youth announced by Phoebus, and amid
The Pythian regents says,—"O hallow'd land!
This stranger dame, this daughter of Erechtheus
Attempts my life by poison." Then decreed
The Delphian lords (nor did one voice dissent)
That she should die, my mistress, from the rock
Cast headlong, as the deed was aim'd against
A sacred life, and impiously presumed
This hallow'd place with murder to profane.
Demanded by the state, she this way bends

Her wretched steps. Unhappy to this shrine
She came through fond desire of children; here,
Together with her hopes, her life is lost.

CHORUS (*singing*)

None, there is none, from death no flight,
To me no refuge; our dark deed
Betray'd, betray'd to open light;
The festive bowl, with sprightly wine that flow'd
Mix'd with the Gorgon's viperous blood,
An offering to the dead decreed,
All is betray'd to light: and I,
Cast headlong from the rock, must die.
What flight shall save me from this death,
Borne on swift pinions through the air,
Sunk to the darksome cave beneath,
Or mounted on the rapid car?
Or shall the flying bark unfurl its sails?
Alas, my queen, no flight avails,
Save when some god's auspicious power
Shall snatch us from the dangerous hour.
Unhappy queen, what pangs shall rend thy heart!
Shall we, who plann'd the deathful deed,
Be caught within the toils we spread,
While Justice claims severe her chast'ning part?

(CREUSA *rushes in.*)

CREUSA

I am pursued, ye faithful females, doom'd
To death: the Pythian council hath decreed it:
My life is forfeited.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Unhappy lady,
We know the dreadful ills that close thee round.

CREUSA

Ah, whither shall I fly? From instant death
Scarce hath my foot sped hither, from my foes
By stealth escaping.

LEADER

Whither wouldst thou fly,
But to this altar?

CREUSA
What will that avail me?

LEADER
To kill a suppliant there the law forbids.

CREUSA
But by the law I perish.

LEADER
If their hands
Had seized thee.

CREUSA
Dreadful contest, with drawn swords
They hastily advance.

LEADER
Now take thy seat
At the altar: shouldst thou die ev'n there, thy blood
Will call the vengeance of the god on those
That spilt it: but our fortune we must bear.
(*She takes refuge at the altar as* ION, *guards, and Delphians enter.*)

ION
Bull-visaged sire Cephisus, what a viper
Hast thou produced? a dragon from her eyes
Glaring pernicious flame. Each daring deed
Is hers: less venomous the Gorgon's blood,
With which she purposed to have poison'd me.
Seize her, that the Parnassian rocks may tease
Those nice-adjusted ringlets of her hair,
As down the craggy precipice she bounds.
Here my good genius saved me, e'er I came
To Athens, there beneath my stepdame's wiles
To fall; amid my friends thy fell intents
Have I unravell'd, what a pest to me,
Thy hate how deadly: had thy toils inclosed me
In thine own house, thou wouldst at once have sent me
With complete ruin to the shades below.
But nor the altar nor Apollo's shrine
Shall save thee. Pity, might her voice be heard,
Would rather plead for me and for my mother,
She absent, yet the name remains with me.

Behold that sorceress; with what art she wove
Wile after wile; the altar of the god
Impress'd her not with awe, as if secure.
No vengeance waited her unhallow'd deeds.

CREUSA

I charge thee, kill me not, in my own right,
And in the god's, whose suppliant here I stand.

ION

What right hast thou to plead Apollo's name?

CREUSA

My person hallow'd to the god I offer.

ION

Yet wouldst thou poison one that is the god's.

CREUSA

Thou wast no more Apollo's, but thy father's.

ION

I have been, of a father's wealth I speak.

CREUSA

And now I am: thou hast that claim no more.

ION

But thou art impious: pious were my deeds.

CREUSA

As hostile to my house, I would have kill'd thee.

ION

Did I against thy country march in arms?

CREUSA

And more; thou wouldst have fired Erechtheus' house.

ION

What torch, what brands, what flames had I prepared?

CREUSA

There wouldst thou fix, seizing my right by force.

ION

The land which he possess'd, my father gave me.

CREUSA
What claim hath there the race of Aeolus?

ION
He was its guardian, not with words but arms.

CREUSA
Its soldier then; an inmate, not its lord.

ION
Wouldst thou, through fear of what might happen, kill me?

CREUSA
Lest death should be my portion, if not thine.

ION
Childless thou enviest that my father found me.

CREUSA
And wilt thou make a childless house thy spoil?

ION
Devolves my father then no share to me?

CREUSA
His shield, his spear; be those thine heritage.

ION
Come from the altar, quit that hallow'd seat.

CREUSA
Instruct thy mother, whosoe'er she be.

ION
Shalt thou unpunish'd meditate my death?

CREUSA
Within this shrine if thou wilt murder me.

ION
What pleasure mid these sacred wreaths to die?

CREUSA
We shall grieve one, by whom we have been grieved.

ION
Strange, that the god should give these laws to men,
Bearing no stamp of honour, nor design'd

With provident thought: it is not meet to place
The unrighteous at his altars; worthier far
To be chased thence; nor decent that the vile
Should with their touch pollute the gods: the good,
Oppress'd with wrongs, should at those hallow'd seats
Seek refuge: ill beseems it that the unjust
And just alike should seek protection there.
(*As* ION *and his followers are about to tear* CREUSA *from the altar, the* PRIESTESS *of Apollo enters from the temple.*)

PRIESTESS

Forbear, my son, leaving the oracular seat,
I pass this pale, the priestess of the god,
The guardian of the tripod's ancient law,
Call'd to this charge from all the Delphian dames.

ION

Hail, my loved mother, dear, though not my parent.

PRIESTESS

Yet let me have the name, 'tis grateful to me.

ION

Hast thou yet heard their wily trains to kill me?

PRIESTESS

I have; but void of mercy thou dost wrong.

ION

Should I not ruin those that sought my life?

PRIESTESS

Stepdames to former sons are always hostile.

ION

And I to stepdames ill intreated thus.

PRIESTESS

Be not, this shrine now leaving for thy country.

ION

How, then, by thy monition should I act?

PRIESTESS

Go with good omens, pure to Athens go.

ION
All must be pure that kill their enemies.

PRIESTESS
So do not thou: attentive mark my words.

ION
Speak: from good will whate'er thou say'st must flow.

PRIESTESS
Seest thou the vase I hold beneath mine arm?

ION
I see an ancient ark entwined with wreaths.

PRIESTESS
In this long since an infant I received thee.

ION
What say'st thou? New is thy discourse and strange.

PRIESTESS
In silence have I kept them: now I show them.

ION
And why conceal'd, as long since thou received'st me?

PRIESTESS
The god would have thee in his shrine a servant.

ION
Is that no more his will? How shall I know it?

PRIESTESS
Thy father shown, he sends thee from this land.

ION
Hast thou preserved these things by charge, or how?

PRIESTESS
It was the god that so disposed my thought.

ION
With what design? Speak, finish thy discourse.

PRIESTESS
Ev'n to this hour to keep what then I found.

ION
What gain imports this to me, or what loss?

PRIESTESS
There didst thou lie wrapp'd in thy infant vests.

ION
Thou hast produced whence I may find my mother.

PRIESTESS
Since now the god so wills, but not before.

ION
This is a day of bless'd discoveries.

PRIESTESS
Now take them: o'er all Asia, and the bounds
Of Europe hold thy progress: thou shalt know
These tokens. To do pleasure to the god,
I nurtured thee, my son; now to thy hand
Restore what was his will I should receive
Unbidden, and preserve: for what intent
It was his will, I have not power to say.
That I had these, or where they were conceal'd,
No mortal knew. And now farewell: the love
I bear thee equals what a parent feels.
Let thy inquiries where they ought begin;
First, if some Delphian virgin gave thee birth,
And in this shrine exposed thee; next, if one
Of Greece. From me, and from the god, who feels
An interest in thy fortune, thou hast all.
(*She goes into the temple after giving* ION *the ark.*)

ION
Ah me! the moist tear trickles from mine eye,
When I reflect that she who gave me birth,
By stealth espoused, may with like secrecy
Have sold me, to my infant lips her breast
Denied: but in the temple of the god
Without a name, a servile life I led.
All from the god was gracious, but from fortune
Harsh; for the time when in a mother's arms
I in her fondness should have known some joy
Of life, from that sweet care was I estranged,
A mother's nurture: nor less wretched she,

Thus forced to lose the pleasure in her son.
But I will take this vase, and to the god
Bear it, a hallow'd offering; that from thence
I may find nothing which I would not find.
Should she, that gave me being, chance to be
A slave, to find her were a greater ill,
Than to rest silent in this ignorance.
O Phoebus, in thy temple hang I this.
What am I doing? War I not against
The pleasure of the god, who saved for me
These pledges of my mother? I must dare,
And open these: my fate cannot be shunn'd.
(*He opens the ark.*)
Ye sacred garlands, what have you so long
Conceal'd: ye bands, that keep these precious relics?
Behold the cover of this circular vase;
Its freshness knows no change, as if a god
So will'd; this osier-woven ark yet keeps
Its soundness undecay'd; yet many a year,
Since it contain'd this treasured charge, has pass'd.

CREUSA

What an unhoped-for sight do I behold!

ION

I thought thou long hadst known to keep thee silent.

CREUSA

Silence is mine no more; instruct not me;
For I behold the ark, wherein of old
I laid thee, O my son, an infant babe;
And in the caves of Cecrops, with the rocks
Of Macrai roof'd, exposed thee: I will quit
This altar, though I run on certain death.

ION

Seize her; for by the impulse of the god
She leaves the sculptured altar: bind her hands.

CREUSA

Instantly kill me, so that I embrace
This vase, and thee, and these thy conceal'd pledges.

ION

Is not this strange? I take thee at thy word.

CREUSA
Not strange: a friend thou by thy friends art found.

ION
Thy friend! Yet wouldst thou kill me secretly.

CREUSA
My son: if that to parents is most dear.

ION
Forbear thy wiles; I shall refute them well.

CREUSA
Might I but to come to what I wish, my son!

ION
Is this vase empty, or contains it aught?

CREUSA
Thy infant vests, in which I once exposed thee.

ION
And wilt thou name them to me, ere thou see them?

CREUSA
If I recount them not, be death my meed.

ION
Speak then: thy confidence hath something strange.

CREUSA
A tissue, look, which when a child I wrought.

ION
What is it? Various are the works of virgins.

CREUSA
A slight, unfinish'd essay of the loom.

ION
What figure wrought? Thou shalt not take me thus.

CREUSA
A Gorgon central in the warp enwoven—

ION
What fortune haunts me, O supreme of gods!

CREUSA
And like an aegis edged with serpents round.

ION
Such is the woof, and such the vest I find.

CREUSA
Thou old embroidery of my virgin hands!

ION
Is there aught else besides this happy proof?

CREUSA
Two dragons, an old work, their jaws of gold.

ION
The gift of Pallas, who thus nurtures children?

CREUSA
Emblems of Erichthonius of old times.

ION
Why? for what use? Explain these works of gold.

CREUSA
For ornaments to grace the infant's neck.

ION
See, here they are; the third I wish to know.

CREUSA
A branch of olive then I wreathed around thee,
Pluck'd from that tree which from Minerva's rock
First sprung; if it be there, it still retains
Its verdure: for the foliage of that olive,
Fresh in immortal beauty, never fades.

ION
O my dear mother! I with joy behold thee.
With transport 'gainst thy cheek my cheek recline.
(*They embrace.*)

CREUSA
My son, my son, far dearer to thy mother
Than yon bright orb (the god will pardon me),
Do I then hold thee in my arms, thus found
Beyond my hopes, when in the realms below,
I thought thy habitation 'mong the dead?

ION

O my dear mother, in thy arms I seem
As one that had been dead to life return'd.

CREUSA

Ye wide-expanded rays of heavenly light,
What notes, what high-raised strains shall tell my joy?
This pleasure whence, this unexpected transport?

ION

There was no blessing farther from my thoughts
Than this, my mother, to be found thy son.

CREUSA

I tremble yet.

ION

And hast thou yet a fear,
Holding me, not to hold me?

CREUSA

Such fond hopes
Long time have I renounced. Thou hallow'd matron,
From whom didst thou receive my infant child?
What bless'd hand brought him to Apollo's shrine?

ION

It was the god's appointment: may our life
To come be happy, as the past was wretched.

CREUSA

Not without tears, my son, wast thou brought forth;
Nor without anguish did my hands resign thee.
Now breathing on thy cheek I feel a joy
Transporting me with heartfelt ecstasies.

ION

The words expressive of thy joys speak mine.

CREUSA

Childless no more, no more alone, my house
Now shines with festive joy; my realms now own
A lord; Erechtheus blooms again; no more
His high-traced lineage sees night darkening round,
But glories in the sun's refulgent beams.

ION

Now let my father, since he's present here,
Be partner of the joy which I have given you.

CREUSA

What says my son?

ION

Such, such as I am proved.

CREUSA

What mean thy words? Far other is thy birth.

ION

Ah me! thy virgin bed produced me base.

CREUSA

Nor bridal torch, my son, nor bridal dance
Had graced my nuptial rites, when thou wast born.

ION

Then I'm a wretch, a base-born wretch: say whence.

CREUSA

Be witness, thou by whom the Gorgon died,—

ION

What means this adjuration?

CREUSA

Who hast fix'd
High o'er my cave thy seat amid the rocks
With olive clothed.

ION

Abstruse thy words, and dark.

CREUSA

Where on the cliffs the nightingale attunes
Her songs, Apollo—

ION

Why Apollo named?

CREUSA

Led me in secret to his bed.

ION

Speak on;
Thy words import some glorious fortune to me.

CREUSA

Thee in the tenth revolving month, my son,
A secret pang to Phoebus did I bear.

ION

Thy words, if true, are grateful to my soul.

CREUSA

These swathing bands, thy mother's virgin work,
Wove by my flying shuttle, round thy body
I roll'd; but from thy lips my breast withheld,
A mother's nouriture, nor bathed thy hands
In cleansing lavers; but to death exposed thee,
Laid in the dreary cave, to birds of prey
A feast, rent piecemeal by their ravenous beaks.

ION

Cruel, my mother, was thy deed.

CREUSA

By fear
Constrain'd, my son, I cast thy life away;
Unwillingly I left thee there to die.

ION

And from my hands unholy were thy death.

CREUSA

Dreadful was then my fortune, dreadful here,
Whirl'd by the eddying blast from misery there
To misery here, and back again to joy:
Her boisterous winds are changed; may she remain
In this repose: enough of ills are past:
After the storm soft breathes a favouring gale.

LEADER

From this example, mid the greatest ills
Never let mortal man abandon hope.

ION

O thou, that hast to thousands wrought a change
Of state ere this, involving them in ills,

And raising them to happiness again;
Fortune, to what a point have I been carried,
Ready to kill my mother, horrid thought!
But in the sun's bright course each day affords
Instruction. Thee, my mother, have I found,
In that discovery bless'd; nor hath my birth
Aught I can blame: yet one thing would I say
To thee alone:—walk this way: to thine ear
In secret would I whisper this, and throw
The veil of darkness o'er each circumstance.
Take heed, my mother, lest thy maiden fault
Seeks in these secret nuptials to conceal
Its fault, then charges on the god the deed;
And, fearing my reproach, to Phoebus gives
A son, to Phoebus whom thou didst not bear.

CREUSA

By her, who 'gainst the giants in her car
Fought by the side of Jove, victorious Pallas,
No one of mortal race is father to thee,
But he who brought thee up, the royal Phoebus.

ION

Why give his son then to another father?
Why say that I was born the son of Xuthus?

CREUSA

Not born the son of Xuthus; but he gives thee,
Born from himself (as friend to friend may give
His son), and heir adopted to his house.

ION

True is the god, his tripod else were vain.
Not without cause then is my mind perplex'd.

CREUSA

Hear what my thoughts suggest: to work thee good
Apollo placed thee in a noble house.
Acknowledged his, the rich inheritance
Could not be thine, nor could a father's name;
For I conceal'd my nuptials, and had plann'd
To kill thee secretly: for this the god
In kindness gives thee to another father.

ION

My mind is prompt to entertain such thoughts;
But, entering at his shrine will I inquire
If from a mortal father I am sprung,
Or from Apollo.—Ha! what may this be?
What god above the hallow'd dome unveils
His radiant face that shines another sun?
Haste, let us fly: the presence of the gods
'Tis not for mortals to behold, and live.

(MINERVA *appears from above.*)

MINERVA [4]

Fly not; in me no enemy you fly;
At Athens friendly to you, and no less
Here. From that land I come, so named from me,
By Phoebus sent with speed: unmeet he deems it
To show himself before you, lest with blame
The past be mention'd; this he gave in charge,
To tell thee that she bore thee, and to him,
Phoebus thy father; he to whom he gave thee,
Not as to the author of thy being gives thee,
But to the inheritance of a noble house.
This declaration made, lest thou shouldst die,
Kill'd by thy mother's wily trains, or she
By thee, these means to save you he devised.
These things in silence long conceal'd, at Athens
The royal Phoebus would have made it known
That thou art sprung from her, thy father he:
But to discharge my office, and unfold
The oracle of the god, for which you yoked
Your chariots, hear: Creusa, take thy son,
Go to the land of Cecrops: let him mount
The royal throne; for, from Erechtheus sprung,
That honour is his due, the sovereignty
Over my country: through the states of Greece
Wide his renown shall spread; for from his root
Four sons shall spring, that to the land, the tribes,
The dwellers on my rock, shall give their names.
Geleon the first, Hopletes, Argades,
And from my aegis named Aegicores:
Their sons in fate's appointed time shall fix
Their seats along the coast, or in the isles
Girt by the Aegean sea, and to my land

Give strength; extending thence the opposite plains
Of either continent shall make their own,
Europe and Asia, and shall boast their name
Ionians, from the honour'd Ion call'd.
To thee by Xuthus shall a son be born,
Dorus, from whom the Dorian state shall rise
To high renown; in the Pelopian land,
Another near the Rhian cliffs, along
The sea-wash'd coast, his potent monarchy
Shall stretch, Achaeus; and his subject realms
Shall glory in their chief's illustrious name.
Well hath Apollo quitted him in all:
First, without pain he caused thee bear a son.
That from thy friends thou mightst conceal his birth;
After the birth, soon as his infant limbs
Thy hands had clothed, to Mercury he gave
The charge to take the babe, and in his arms
Convey him hither; here with tenderness
He nurtured him, nor suffer'd him to perish.
Guard now the secret that he is thy son,
That his opinion Xuthus may enjoy
Delighted: thou too hast thy blessings, lady.
And now, farewell: from this relief from ills
A prosperous fortune I to both announce.

ION

O Pallas, daughter of all-powerful Jove!
Not with distrust shall we receive thy words:
I am convinced that Phoebus is my father,
My mother she, not unassured before.

CREUSA

Hear me too, now: Phoebus I praise, before
Unpraised; my son he now restores, of whom
Till now I deem'd him heedless. Now these gates
Are beauteous to mine eyes; his oracles
Now grateful to my soul, unpleasant late.
With rapture on these sounding rings my hands
Now hang; with rapture I address the gates.

MINERVA

This I approve, thy former wayward thoughts
Resign'd, with honour that thou name the god.
Slow are the gifts of Heaven, but found at length
Not void of power.

CREUSA
My son, let us now go
To Athens.

MINERVA
Go; myself will follow you.

CREUSA
A noble guard, and friendly to the state.

MINERVA
But seat him high on thy paternal throne.

CREUSA
A rich possession, and I glory in him.
(MINERVA *disappears.*)

CHORUS (*singing*)
Son of Latona and all-powerful Jove,
Apollo, hail! Though fortune's blackest storms
Rage on his house, the man whose pious soul
Reveres the gods, assumes a confidence,
And justly: for the good at length obtain
The meed of virtue; but the unholy wretch
(Such is his nature) never can be happy.

THE translation of R. Potter, done in the eighteenth century, preserves certain orthographical conventions of that time. Potter likewise uses the Roman forms for various proper names. For example, Hermes and Athena appear as Mercury and Minerva.

1. In connection with this scene, cf. note 1 on Aeschylus, *The Seven Against Thebes.*

2. This soliloquy of Ion perhaps may be evidence for the conclusion that the play has a serious religious orientation.

3. The following description of the tapestry calls to mind the account of the decorations on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad,* Book XVIII.

4. Attention should be called to the elements of aetiology which Euripides has characteristically introduced into this speech.

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